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**A Critical Examination of the Construct of the Inclusive College  
with Specific Reference to Learners Labelled as Dyslexic.**

**Ann-Marie McNicholas BA (Hons), MA, PGCE**

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**PI: U5538543**

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## **Abstract**

This research is concerned with the policy and practice of the inclusion of students experiencing difficulties in learning labelled as dyslexic, in a further education (FE) college. Employing qualitative methodology, the focus is upon a case study of one college and the perspectives of stakeholders - students, tutors, support staff and managers. It investigates what their voices can tell us about factors likely to enhance equality and inclusion for these students. A review of the literature identifies key issues, but also reveals a relative lack of research in the area of dyslexia in FE and the student voice.

In-depth interviews are utilised to gain information on the issues and tensions involved in constructing inclusive processes in FE. Grounded theory is employed to identify themes in the data. Analysis utilises concepts drawn from critical theory to provide an explanation of the findings within the wider political and ideological contexts in which these processes operate.

This research found that the workings of the further education system within a bureaucratic, market driven system are adversely impacting upon the experiences of students labelled as dyslexic. The systems and policies in place serve to deflect attention away from issues of pedagogy, politics and power relations by locating barriers to learning within the individual learner, promoting exclusion and inequality. This is in direct contrast to an overtly stated college policy and mission statement of promoting equality. The research also highlights how this system with competing ideologies and policies serves to silence student voices when they attempt to assert their rights and desires. Evident too, is the silencing of tutor voices by a pressurised, target driven system. I argue that a social model approach is required, where barriers to learning are located within attitudes, environment and organisational structures, to promote a response more aligned to consideration of rights, equity and inclusion of learners.

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# **CHAPTER 1: Background to Study**

## **Introduction**

This study investigates how inclusive processes are constructed within the context of a further education (FE) college, with specific reference to students experiencing difficulties in learning who are labelled as dyslexic. Inclusion relates to all students, but this research focuses specifically on the experiences of this group of students, as it is related to my professional role. However, it is anticipated that lessons learned from students labelled as dyslexic will have a wider application to all students. As the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE, 2008a) states, inclusion in education involves ‘...learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely’.

## **My professional role**

My role in college is that of ‘Dyslexia Coordinator’, specifically responsible for ensuring that students experiencing difficulties in learning labelled as dyslexic receive their entitlement to additional learning support and reasonable adjustments, to afford them an equitable learning experience. As a specialist teacher, I am also tasked with assessing students who are referred to learning support to identify any difficulties in learning. The word ‘identify’ in this study is used instead of the word ‘diagnose’, as the latter has medical connotations which, as will be discussed, this study seeks to avoid. Identification refers to the formal assessment process performed by either a psychologist or a specialist teacher.

The student can be funded for support in FE if there is evidence of difficulties in learning. If a tutor feels a student requires additional support, he/she will often refer the student for an assessment in order to establish this need. Some students will arrive having been

identified as dyslexic at school. Others (increasingly) may have been labelled at school as experiencing literacy difficulties, but not had a formal assessment. Many students are highlighted as experiencing difficulties with literacy whilst studying at college and are referred by class tutors for help or assessment. Some students also refer themselves.

In many ways I have a vested interest in dyslexia as my role in college involves actively supporting learners with a label of dyslexia. As the research progressed, however, I became increasingly aware of tensions between my practice and my research discoveries and the fact that I was potentially part of the problem. Constant reflection and interrogation of my values, language and practices have been an essential element of the research process.

### Deciding to research

Recent years has seen the implementation of legislation - the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) , now superseded by the Equality Act (2010) - that outlines post 16 institutions' responsibilities for responding to the requirements of these learners. In addition, there are college policies in place ostensibly to guide staff in doing this. The college mission statement declares that 'The needs of our students always come first' with one of the college values stated as striving for '...equal opportunities and the celebration of diversity'.

Nevertheless, many students labelled as dyslexic who were in receipt of additional learning support were informing me explicitly and vociferously that they were still experiencing many barriers to learning. For example, some showed me handouts and worksheets that were difficult to read; others were frustrated at methods of delivery that did not match their style of learning. Clearly there was a problem. I decided to investigate the problem the students presented to me, in an effort to understand why they were not apparently receiving the education to which they were entitled.

## **Theoretical perspective**

The theoretical perspective that frames this research, informed by the legislation and the literature, begins with the premise that education is a fundamental human right (Human Rights Act, 1998). I strongly believe that every individual, regardless of impairment, race, religion, gender, nationality, age, ethnic origin, social origin or any other characteristic is entitled to full access to and participation in education on an equal basis. Inclusion is premised upon moral values of human rights and equality, respect and valuing diversity (CSIE, 2008a). The construct of the inclusive college is thus one that values the diversity of its learners, provides equal opportunities in education and responds appropriately to the requirements of all learners.

Yet, there are some factors that prevent some learners from participating as equals in education. My practice has identified many students who are experiencing difficulties who are labelled as dyslexic. Whatever the ideological arguments surrounding the concept of dyslexia – its nature and even existence, (and these will be further discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis), the college should be equipped to accept and respond effectively to the diversity of its learners. Whilst FE colleges have traditionally been well placed to be more accessible and responsive to a diversity of learners than other educational institutions (James and Biesta, 2007), and there are laws and policies that ostensibly promote inclusive practice, the question remains as to whether the rhetoric is stronger than the reality of implementation. Students labelled as dyslexic have rights in law, but the realisation of those rights within the context of FE is beset with difficulties, as there are many factors which militate against the construct of the inclusive college. The construct is much more complex than it would first appear. It is my contention that it goes much further than legislation, policy and the provision of additional learning support. The purpose of this research therefore, is to critically examine these issues in more detail. Thus, within an

overarching framework concerned with gaining insights into the construct of the inclusive college, three particular questions are posed:

1. What are the factors that enhance and inhibit the construction of inclusive processes in FE for this group of learners labelled as dyslexic?
2. In what ways can the college develop and improve inclusive practices to enhance the learning experience of students labelled as dyslexic?
3. What can this study tell us about the inclusive nature of FE generally and how inclusive practice can be promoted across the sector?

These questions were developed from a review of the literature, with key themes providing a context and rationale for the study, as detailed in Chapter 2.

### **Terminology**

Terminology in this area is problematic and fraught with difficulties. Language plays a very powerful role in how we construct and explain our world (Corbett, 1996). The words and language surrounding learners such as those experiencing difficulties in learning tends to imply deficiency, inadequacy and weaknesses, and consequently less value. If issues such as equal rights and valuing of diversity are to be addressed, then the language used to define these learners must be treated as problematical.

As a practitioner in the field I am presented with a range of terminology that varies from school to FE to higher education that is attempting, often inadequately in my view, to describe people who are experiencing difficulties in learning. Even the descriptor of my role – that of ‘Dyslexia Coordinator’ I find problematic. It assumes, like much in the area of additional learning support, that concepts such as dyslexia are neutral, apolitical. My role and the Learning Support Department is traditionally embedded in the psycho-medical paradigm, where difficulties in learning are perceived as ‘deficits’ within the learner and

individual ‘remedies’ sought to ameliorate the learner’s problem. However, how these learners’ ‘problems’ are constructed is very much a social and political process. From my perspective of asserting the rights of all students to equitable educational access, terminology must move away from the ‘problem’ being with the individual, to a more inclusive style of language that reflects a collective responsibility for responding to these learners’ requirements. I therefore now outline the working definitions adopted for this study.

### Towards a definition of inclusion

The concept of inclusion in education is contested and has a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations, utilised variously by academics, politicians and bureaucrats (Clough, 2000). Booth (1996) highlights the danger of reifying the concept as a particular practice available for study, arguing instead that inclusion should be viewed as ‘an unending set of processes, rather than a state’ (p89). Similarly, Tomlinson (Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), 1996), outlining his vision of an inclusive further education sector, emphasises inclusion as a process or set of processes to be constantly worked at as situations and contexts change.

Therefore my working definition for this thesis is that inclusion is a process whereby educational institutions develop cultures and procedures that recognise, value and celebrate the diversity of skills and abilities of all their learners and respond in such a way as to enable all learners to access and participate equitably in the learning opportunities offered.

### The concept of dyslexia

Again, a controversial and problematical term, (discussed further in the Literature Review in Chapter 2), dyslexia can be defined in a variety of ways. Much of the literature describes dyslexia as a difficulty with skills of reading, spelling and writing, with a particular emphasis placed upon reading (Rice and Brooks, 2004). However, since the varying



definitions contain different ideas about what constitutes dyslexia and different assumptions about the causes of the literacy difficulties, there is little agreement upon who might be described as dyslexic (ibid). To say that someone is dyslexic implies that dyslexia is a condition with a biological cause, prompting responses that treat people as 'different' and in need of a 'cure' (Burden, 2002). Yet, the underpinning philosophy of inclusion is that colleges and teachers '...must fit or match themselves to students, rather than the other way round' (FEFC, 1996, p32).

From an inclusive perspective, therefore, it is argued that difficulties are experienced by learners when there is a mismatch between what they bring to the learning situation and teachers' expectations of them (Cooper, 2006), in addition to the teaching methods and resources available. Adopting this perspective removes the focus from describing the individual to identifying the specific characteristics and the social and cultural contexts that produce or exacerbate the difficulties. Dyslexia, then, becomes a label that is applied to some learners to explain their differences and the difficulties they experience in learning. In this study, therefore, these learners will be referred to as students experiencing difficulties in learning labelled as dyslexic. This is more aligned to the social model of disability (Oliver, 1983) which focuses upon the disabling effects of societal attitudes upon individuals with impairments. Arguably this is a more inclusive approach to the terminology. Such a philosophy relinquishes the idea of 'normality' – that there is a 'normal' learner by which other learners can be measured and that those who are identified as not conforming to this 'norm' require treatment and remedies. As part of my role is to assess students using norm referenced materials, this has inevitably created tensions and dilemmas between my researcher role and my professional role in the organisation. My reflexive analysis in Chapter 7 addresses these issues in more detail.

## Context of study

The case study college is a further education or tertiary college. The term 'tertiary' means that the college offers vocational courses that characterise FE provision, in addition to academic courses that characterise 6<sup>th</sup> form college provision. It is situated in a relatively affluent, semi-rural area in the North West of England. It employs around 850 staff and serves approximately 7000 full-time and part-time students, from the age of 14 to adult. It is part of the general post 16 sector that also comprises 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges and specialist colleges (for example, art, design and performing arts, agricultural and horticultural colleges).

The characteristics of the further education sector differ significantly from that of schools in a variety of ways that contribute to the debate on the construct of the inclusive college. FE has its origins in the provision of vocational education rather than academic courses, with 'technical colleges' initially set up to meet the demands of the local community in providing part-time work-based adult education and training (Johnstone, 1995). Evening classes were provided whereby workers could improve their basic skills. From their early vocational/technical roots, FE colleges have since expanded to deliver academic courses such as GCSEs and A levels, with some colleges, including the one in which I work, being affiliated with a university and offering higher education and franchised degree courses. In addition they deliver adult basic skills courses and increasingly provide vocational opportunities for post 14 learners as part of their role within the government agenda for an increasingly skilled and competitive workforce (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007). Work based learning, national vocational qualifications and apprenticeship programmes are a prominent feature of provision, including that of the case study college, as the sector responds to industry demands.

The learner population of FE is quite diverse as it comprises not only those deciding to attend college after leaving compulsory schooling at the age of 16, but also adults returning

to education to gain new qualifications or skills. For many learners it is a second opportunity at education, these learners often working class or from minority backgrounds, disillusioned and disaffected by a problematic school life (James and Biesta, 2007). FE has, for some considerable time, been welcoming and well placed to respond to the requirements of these learners. It is argued, though, that this has not only contributed to its rather low status in the hierarchy of educational institutions, but also facilitated more extreme types of managerialism and funding (ibid). These issues are discussed in more detail in the literature review in Chapter 2 as they figure significantly in the debate surrounding the construction of inclusive processes in this context.

A further distinctive feature of the FE sector is the profile of staff, variously described as tutors, instructors, trainers, teachers or lecturers, whose diversity, according to James and Biesta (2007), is an important characteristic often overlooked outside the sector. Unlike teachers in school who predominantly enter the teaching profession straight from university having gained a degree and a teaching qualification, the entry into FE teaching is somewhat more varied. Many entrants have previous industrial or occupational experience but do not necessarily have a degree or a teaching qualification (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009). Whilst some may have subsequently gained teaching qualifications, unlike the requirements for school teaching, it was not compulsory for FE tutors to be teacher trained until 2001.

As the case study college structure in Figure 1.1 (below, p15) illustrates, FE, unlike the general collegial structure of schools, is characterised by an incredible diversity of provision in terms of subjects and functions. As James and Biesta (2007) note, many of these will have their own cultural identities, often vocationally related (or function related in the case of learning support), that determine ‘the way things are and have to be’ (ibid, p85). Engineers teach engineering, caterers teach catering. The hierarchical and departmentalised structure of the college has potential implications for collegiality of

working practices necessary for facilitating inclusive processes. I return to this issue when analysing the data in Chapters 4 and 5.

PRINCIPAL					
Senior Management	Finance	Vocational	A Level	Adult	
	DEPUTY PRINCIPALS				
	ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS				
Middle Management		HEADS OF SUBJECT/FUNCTION			
		HEADS OF PASTORAL SUPPORT			
		Sport	Humanities	Teaching & Learning	
		Health and Social Care	Music, Media and Performing Arts	Business Management	
		Public Services	Law	16-18 & Adult	
		Hair and Beauty	Visual Arts	Apprentice	
		Hospitality & Tourism	Business	Business Training	
		Engineering	Psychology		
		ICT and Computing	English		
		Maths			
		Science			
	Estates	Learning Support	Schools Liaison	Marketing	
	Finance	Library		Sales	
		Student Services			
Team leaders	LECTURER 2				
Tutors	LECTURER 1				

**Figure 1.1: Structure of Case Study College**

The variety of provision operates around separate departments either in subject areas (schools) or functions (services). Each department is quite autonomous, with a distinct identity and character.

Whilst the case study college places much emphasis on its staff having a teaching qualification (data from the 2010 college self assessment report indicated that the college

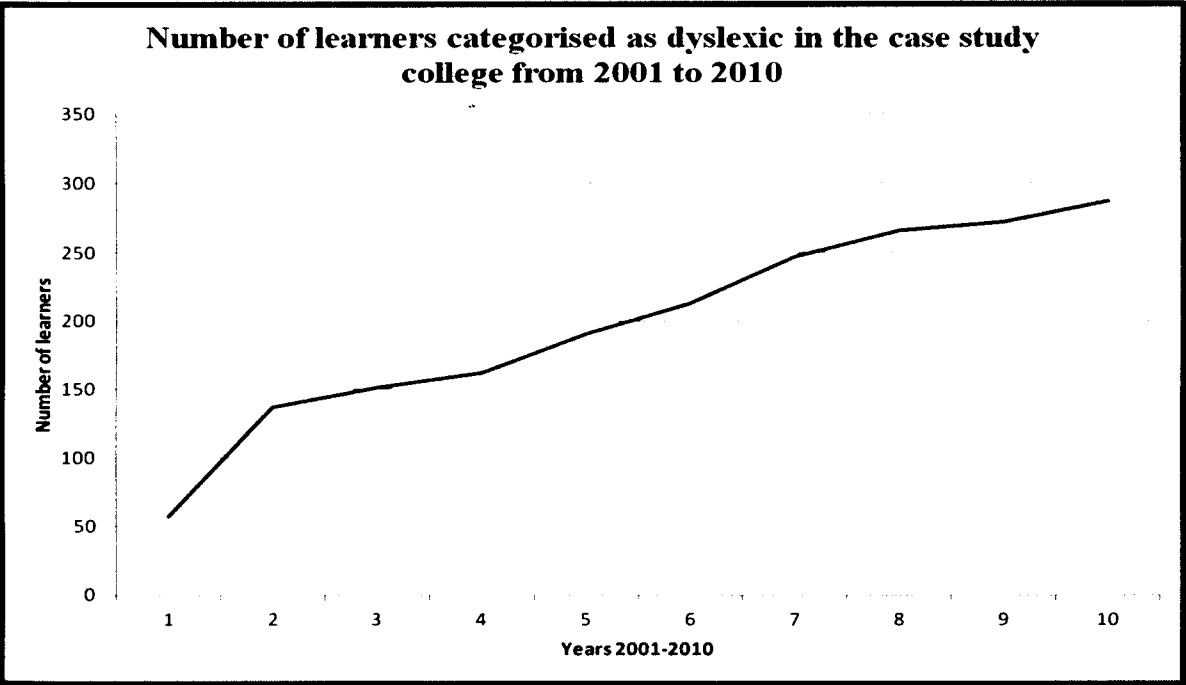
perceived that it had an exceptionally high proportion of qualified teaching staff), often, as Bathmaker and Avis (2005) note, lecturers in FE have traditionally been recruited not for their teaching skills but for their vocational or industrial experience and qualifications. This fragmented approach to teacher preparation in FE has implications for the skills required in responding to the requirements of its diverse learner population. In addition, employment contracts in FE can often be part-time and flexible as the sector is required to respond to both local and national market demands - what Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) refer to as a 'deficit' model of provision, reacting rather than having control over its provision. Unlike schools, there is much uncertainty, informality and flexibility in the recruitment of staff which, as James and Biesta (2007) found, has implications for staff training and development. High staff turnover results in a need for employers to constantly replenish training and expertise (Heathcote and Brindley, 2006). Thus, the variety of experiences, qualifications and mode of entry of staff to the sector amounts to 'a rather fractured professional base' (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009, p971).

The implications of these unique characteristics of FE for college policy making and implementation, lines of communication, pedagogical practices and effective teaching and learning are discussed in Chapters 4 to 5 when stakeholders express their views on factors that enhance and inhibit inclusive processes.

### **Rationale**

It is recognised that FE has a central role as part of the government's aim to develop a skilled and competitive workforce focusing upon developing basic skills and workforce skills, greater vocational opportunities and widening participation (DCSF, 2007). The result is that, for disabled learners and learners experiencing difficulties in learning, participation rates have seen a huge increase from around 43 000 learners in HE and FE in 1987 (Lavender and Cooper, 2006) to around 560 000 in FE alone in 2010, equating to around 12% of all FE learners (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011a). A

national survey carried out on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2009 found that the most commonly reported category is dyslexia, accounting for 27 per cent of all learners declaring a learning difficulty, disability or health condition (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b). The case study college too, has seen an increase in the number of students in recent years recorded as having a label of dyslexia, as illustrated in Figure 1.2 below.



**Figure 1.2:** Illustration of the growth in the numbers of learners recorded under the category of dyslexia in the case study college over the last 10 years.

Source of data: College Self-Assessment Annual Reports.

The data is derived from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) which records information on learners in the Further Education sector in England. It is compulsory for colleges to provide this information. It is based upon self identification of a difficulty with learning, whether or not the learner is receiving additional support. Where it considered that learners are not able to self identify, ‘information will be recorded as a result of interviews with learners, their parents, guardians, teachers or advocates’ (The Information

Authority, 2011, p37). Appendix 1 details the categories of learning difficulty and codes used on the Individualised Learner Record.

Whilst, as Wray and Houghton (2007) point out, statistics need to be treated with some caution as attitudes towards declaring disabilities change, as do the categories used to define them, it is undeniable that there have been, over the last several years, increasing numbers of students labelled as dyslexic attending further education colleges. Some of this increase may be attributable to government initiatives on widening participation in post compulsory education. It may also, in part, be attributable to increasing awareness and identification of dyslexia, in addition to changing attitudes, leading to a greater willingness on the part of learners to disclose (Wray and Houghton, 2007). Whilst this data may appear to suggest greater moves towards inclusion, the question remains as to whether their needs are being met within this context. My experience as a tutor and Dyslexia Coordinator at the college and the discussions I have with students, support staff and tutors, suggests that there are many issues and difficulties. Despite legislation and policy set up to embed the rights of all students to equality of learning opportunities, students in the case study college are still encountering barriers to learning. This is in line with many government reports such as the Foster Report (2005), which claimed that provision for learners experiencing difficulties in learning remains ‘*variable*’ (p28) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) report of 2006 which stated that despite current legislation, many learners labelled as dyslexic are still experiencing barriers to learning. Under the law, this constitutes discrimination. It is my contention that constructing inclusive processes in FE is far more complex than having legislation, policies and the provision of additional learning support. It is the intention of this study, therefore, to investigate the factors that impact upon the construction of inclusive processes in this context.

## Significance of research

Whilst there is much research on schools and inclusion, less is discussed about post compulsory education. In 1997, Randle and Brady noted that the FE sector ‘appears all but invisible’ (p121) in the research arena. The situation appears little improved today, with commentators remarking that FE is still an area that is significantly under-researched (James and Biesta, 2007, Mather et al, 2008), in comparison with schools and universities. This study is therefore useful in terms of the contribution it can make to knowledge on FE. Whilst I am interested in the inclusion of all learners in education, this study focuses particularly upon learners labelled as dyslexic. This is because firstly, these are the learners for whom I currently have responsibility and I wish to develop my professional role in enhancing their learning experience. Secondly, I found little existing research on inclusion and the experiences of students labelled as dyslexic in FE. Some of the literature (e.g. Singleton et al, 1999, Farmer et al, 2002) has investigated the experiences of these learners in higher education settings, but there appears to be much less in the literature that addresses the issues surrounding the inclusion of learners in FE, and more specifically, those labelled as dyslexic, despite the apparent growth in the numbers of these students in FE in recent years. This study can therefore shed light on issues for these students pertinent to the FE context.

Finally, much research related to dyslexia takes an individual deficit approach, often investigating the effectiveness of individual interventions designed to ameliorate the ‘problem’ of dyslexia. Research that listens to the views and experiences of learners, whilst growing, is still relatively small. I therefore decided to listen to the voices of the students to investigate their lived experiences. As Nightingale (2006) states, because students ‘...are the experts by experience of their own circumstances, they can tell us what we need to do to act equally’ (p3).



This study will therefore contribute to the literature at a methodological level, by highlighting the importance of listening to learners' views as a means of informing policy and provision. My study will add to the body of knowledge on learners' perspectives of their experiences of inclusion and exclusion, providing insights from a student perspective on how these processes may be developed. In addition, the study offers a more inclusive methodology whereby learners' perspectives steer the research agenda. As the learners are active participants in the research, the study can add to the body of knowledge on more emancipatory methods of research. Whilst I was unable to facilitate a wide range of emancipatory strategies, it is the student voice and the importance I attach to their opinions and concerns in this study that leads to a widening of the research agenda – their expressions of disaffection leading me to involve staff in the research, to respond to concerns relating to the formulation and implementation of policy.

## **Summary**

The construct of the inclusive college is one that values the diversity of its learners, provides equal opportunities in education and responds appropriately to the requirements of all learners. The issues I am therefore interested in relate to how far the case study college is aligned to this construct, what is required to further promote inclusive processes in the college and the significance of wider factors pertaining to the FE sector generally.

To investigate these issues I have identified the following aims and objectives:

### **Aims of study**

- To critically examine how inclusive processes are constructed within one college of further education. This is steered by listening to the experiences of students labelled as dyslexic, to identify factors that enhance and factors that inhibit inclusive processes from their perspective.

- To investigate the views of tutors, management and support workers on issues raised by the students and deconstruct policy to analyse the college response to these learners.
- To suggest ways in which the college can improve practice to enhance the learning experience of students labelled as dyslexic.
- To analyse general themes to emerge from the research to inform the wider debate on what can be done to remove barriers to learning in the further education sector.

### Objectives of study

In order to achieve these aims, the study has the following objectives:

- To conduct a review of current literature to examine the concepts of inclusion and dyslexia and provide a context for the study.
- To ascertain the perspectives of learners and other stakeholders.
- To analyse data collected, identifying key themes, discourses and barriers to learning.
- To reflect on the process of conducting research to identify ethical and methodological issues.
- To analyse and evaluate the information gathered to identify ways in which inclusive practice can be developed, not only for students labelled as dyslexic but for all learners.

Whilst the findings can inform policy and practice within my own institution, I acknowledge the limitations of the study in terms of its generalisability to other institutions and the FE sector generally. Rather, I aim for what Bassey (1999) refers to as ‘fuzzy generalisations’ (p52) – statements with uncertainty, suggesting what *may* happen. The findings may, with some caution, shed light on issues pertinent to other institutions with similar issues and also potentially the sector generally, identifying characteristics distinctive to FE that can facilitate or inhibit inclusive processes.

## **Outline of the thesis**

Having detailed my motivations and rationale for conducting this research in Chapter 1, the thesis is structured and presented as follows. Chapter 2 is concerned with a review of relevant literature. I begin with an account of the nature and characteristics of further education, to set the scene and put the research into context. The concept of inclusion is explored and its history with regard to the FE context. The concept of dyslexia is reviewed and the origin of discourses and dominant ideas linked to dyslexia and inclusion examined. Chapter 3 details my methodology and justification for the methods utilised. In chapters 4 and 5 research question number 1 is addressed, relating to factors that enhance and inhibit inclusive processes. Chapter 4 is concerned with teaching and learning and Chapter 5 relates to issues of support. Chapter 6 addresses research question 2. In this chapter I summarise my findings and provide some recommendations for developing inclusive processes in the case study college. Chapter 7 focuses upon research question 3 and discusses general themes to emerge from the study and the implications of the findings for the sector generally. Potential areas that require further investigation and research are identified. I conclude the chapter with my reflections upon personal, professional and ethical issues encountered in conducting this research.

## **CHAPTER 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the key literature pertaining to the study in order to provide a context for the research questions and provide a theoretical framework. The role of FE and its development is examined to provide the context within which the stakeholders in this study are operating. The review investigates the legislative and policy background with regard to the development of inclusion in FE. The discussion considers its rationale, particularly relating to rights of learners to be included and examines wider issues of power in relation to whose voices are heard. Inclusion as it pertains to students labelled as dyslexic is discussed. This involves exploring the various ways of viewing dyslexia and how they impact upon policy and provision for these learners. It is important to explore the terminology in this area and how language affects how we conceptualise students experiencing difficulties in learning who are labelled as dyslexic. Research on barriers to learning experienced by learners in FE is outlined. Finally, theories of the management of change are explored to consider how to move forward with developing inclusive processes in order to respond more effectively to the diversity of learners in FE.

### **The nature of Further Education**

The FE college has altered dramatically from its early conception and has undergone rapid change and expansion, as it responded to legislation and a number of government policy drivers, including widening participation initiatives and economic levers, focusing upon improving skills for a global economy. Thus, from their early vocational/technical roots, FE colleges have expanded to provide for a diversity of learners with a wide range of provision, as outlined in Chapter 1. Within the context of these new policy initiatives, it is argued that FE is beginning to relinquish its traditional Cinderella image as it plays a more prominent role in the education system (Bathmaker and Avis, 2005, Coffield et al, 2008).

A significant influence upon current FE policy and practice is the impact of market forces, which has particular relevance to my study in terms of how it operates alongside the development of inclusive processes. Mather et al (2008) trace the origins of the marketisation of FE to general public sector policy, instigated by the Conservative government of the 1980s. Legislation was concerned with privatization and subjecting public services to the competition of the market, founded upon neo-liberal ideas that the public sector is best served by a market economy (ibid). This led to a particular form of managerialism designed to control costs and increase accountability (ibid).

The impact of these changes were to be observed in FE following the 1996 Further and Higher Education Act - 'incorporation' saw the release of FE institutions from local authority control, with financial and managerial control being delegated to the governing bodies of these institutions. This marked a radical alteration to its working practices, with a market orientated, managerial approach expected, aligned to the business model upon which the sector was now founded. Still, FE was not completely independent – although having gained significantly more autonomy, as Randle and Brady (1997) note, control was effectively maintained by central government via the mechanism of the funding of colleges. FE is thus arguably more of what Trowler (2003) describes a 'quasi market' in education. The new Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) introduced a formula whereby colleges were paid in a three stage process for the enrolment, retention and achievement of students. If college targets for any of these criteria were not met, college funds were retracted. The FEFC was subsequently replaced by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and in 2010 the LSC was replaced by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). Nevertheless, the general principles of the funding formula remain the same today with the funding body '...a crucial agency in the new management of FE in terms of funding, inspection and quality control' (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p449).

These funding arrangements, alongside the increased autonomy of FE colleges, have promoted aggressive competition between institutions, with college management driven to enhancing their competitive advantage and share of the market (ibid). Whilst the accompanying rhetoric to these reforms was one of making data (on exam results, etc.) more transparent and increasing consumer choice, the effect of these policies upon equality of opportunity was perceived by many commentators as highly detrimental. Some of the criticisms that Trowler (2003), for example, identifies, are outlined below.

1. The reforms prompted educational institutions to become more selective in their quest to achieve the targets set, choosing those perceived to be more likely to succeed.

The case study college sets higher entry requirements for its level 3 courses (A Levels and Advanced Vocational Qualifications) than other local colleges. Arguably this could be perceived to operate against the notion of access for all. (Appendix 2 details the qualifications structure of FE).

2. Students considered 'difficult' are excluded more readily.

This not only protects the reputations of the institutions for discipline as Trowler (2003) asserts, but also, if students are considered a risk to retention data, excluding them before particular census dates protects the establishment's data as they are not included in the end of year figures. Students who are experiencing difficulties in learning may be particularly vulnerable to this policy (DfEE, 1999).

3. That the funding is connected to achievement also results in the temptation for colleges to confer qualifications on students who would not otherwise have achieved them.

The extent to which this is evident in the case study college is examined in later chapters on data analysis.

Thus, the reform of educational institutions into a market or quasi market economy has had wide ranging effects, with clear tensions apparent between the policy of marketisation and the policy of promoting inclusive processes in FE.

Accompanying these reforms in FE were also changes in the working conditions of lecturers. New contracts replaced the old 'Silver Book' agreement which was a national contract for FE lecturers specifying maximum weekly and annual class contact teaching hours. The new contracts entailed increased teaching hours, fewer holidays and reduced pay (Shain and Gleeson, 1999). The impact of these changes was significant, according to Mather et al (2008) in two respects. Firstly, it shifted the balance of power to management over the control of the parameters of lecturers' contractual duties, reducing their autonomy; secondly it increased the amount of contact time in the classroom, thus contributing to an intensification of workload. More recent developments involve what Whitehead (2005) refers to as the 'performativity culture' which, he says, 'celebrates that which can be measured, weighed and 'objectively' assessed' (p17). It was, he asserts, New Labour's means of promoting more transparency and probity in the sector, but the consequences, he argues, are that the focus for lecturers is now upon 'ensuring the paper trail works rather than the learning does' (p17), as success is measured by easily quantifiable paper trails. Thus, a 'tick box' culture has emerged along with inflexible bureaucratic systems and procedures that have little concern with the quality of the student learning experience (ibid). The role of the lecturer in FE has thus altered too, in recent years. Added to their teaching duties is now greater accountability for results and frequently a curriculum or programme leadership role and managerial responsibilities, but reduced autonomy (ibid). Whitehead (2005) asserts that the performativity culture has fostered a lack of trust in decision making – it is safer for the institution not to take risks, so lecturers learn to value the systems and procedures and 'to play the system' (ibid, p18). This has implications for

inclusive processes in terms of tutors' perceived ability to respond effectively to a diverse learner population and is therefore pertinent to this study.

It is apparent from these discussions that education is not neutral and value free – it takes place in a political context (Corbett and Barton, 1992), and within this wider national context of the provision of education, contradictions and ambiguities abound. Concepts such as 'outputs', 'targets' and 'unit costs' linked to the business model, pepper educational language and policies. Further education has to continually respond to economic and political pressures. Unlike schools, recruitment and sustaining courses in FE is directly affected by the dictates of the economy and employment opportunities in society. Thus, the case study college, like all colleges, has to demonstrate even higher achievement rates year on year, if it is to maintain its prestigious place in the league tables and attract the students necessary for its survival in the market. This is a high priority for colleges.

The effect of this market discourse upon inclusive processes is discussed in more detail when examining inclusion within the context of FE. However, it is firstly necessary to review the key debates and theories surrounding the notion of inclusion.

### **The concept of inclusion**

The term 'inclusion' is not new in education, it being an apparent import in the 1980s from the USA (Dyson and Millward, 2000). It is difficult to define and, as already stated, a contentious and contested concept. As Norwich (2007) states, 'Inclusion has a multiplicity of meanings: it can refer to being under the same roof, being in the same class, and/or being engaged in the common enterprise of learning' (p70).

The term is often used interchangeably with, and considered to mean the same as 'mainstreaming' (Peacey, 2005) or 'integration' – all students being incorporated into



regular educational settings, rather than some receiving separate provision. For many, however, there are important distinctions in the meanings of these terms, and, inevitably in a pluralist society, a multiplicity of meanings (Smith and Armstrong, 2005), creating much confusion about how inclusion is both defined and understood.

One of the difficulties, according to Barton (1997), is in clarifying how the terms inclusion and integration differ. A significant difference between the two concepts, it is argued, lies in their value base, with the concept of inclusion embodying notions of justice, equality and compassion (Wilson, 2000), in contrast to the concept of integration which implies merely a physical or geographical relocation. The students in this study are learning in the same college. They could be perceived to be experiencing inclusion in the geographical sense, but this does not necessarily mean that they are experiencing inclusion in the learning experiences on offer. As Feiler and Gibson (1999) state, whilst practices may on the surface appear to be supportive of inclusive processes, on closer analysis they often reveal a range of exclusionary practices taking place. Experiences comprise a multitude of moment by moment interactions; inclusion therefore is not a fixed state to be achieved once and for all - rather, as Booth, (1996) posits, it should be perceived as 'an unending set of processes' (p89). The concept, I argue, goes much further than students' physical location and inclusion within a 'mainstream' college. Inclusion is also about equitable access to learning opportunities within the college classroom.

### Inclusive pedagogy

If, as is asserted in this study, inclusion is concerned with equity of access to classroom teaching and learning, it is necessary to examine curricula and pedagogy. Historically, it has been assumed that some learners experiencing difficulties in learning require different, specialised approaches to teaching in order to address their 'specific' needs and the arena of special schools and special needs provision has been characterised by such approaches (Nind, 2005). However, Corbett and Norwich (2005) point to the lack of evidence of the

benefits to learning of such approaches, and the fact that the provision separated learners from the peers in the mainstream classroom. Clough (2005) argues that judgements in the classroom about ‘abilities’ of learners inevitably mean that curricula are a means of excluding - separating some learners from others. A pivotal debate within inclusive education is thus whether students experiencing difficulties in learning require different teaching methods and strategies, or whether there should be common pedagogical practices within the classroom, extended to accommodate all learners (Corbett and Norwich, 2005). Hart (2004) suggests the concept of ‘learning without limits’, a reorganisation of curriculum and pedagogy that is not based upon notions of ‘average’ and ‘able’ learners, of different groups of learners with different requirements. Her ideas challenge assumptions of fixed ability and thus limits to educability, and she proposes instead a pedagogical model characterised by ‘**transformability**’ (p228) - teachers harnessing their power to change things to make a positive difference. This involves making decisions for the benefit of all learners and harnessing students’ powers to learn given the right learning environment. She cites examples of good practice. These include worksheets with an activity presented differently on each side, trusting the learner to choose the activity most appropriate for them; being prepared to explain several times until students are happy that they understand and being sensitive about comments on work and the potential effects on students’ sense of self-worth. Activities are designed and implemented to facilitate the involvement of all learners, not just some learners – they are **made** accessible (Hart, 2004). This approach is reflected in Florian and Black-Hawkins’ (2011) conceptualisation of inclusive pedagogy.

Our conceptualisation of inclusive pedagogy focuses on how to extend what is ordinarily available in the community of the classroom as a way of reducing the need to mark some learners as different. This is underpinned by a shift in pedagogical thinking from an approach that works for *most*

learners existing alongside something ‘additional’ or ‘different’ for those (*some*) who experience difficulties, towards one that involves providing rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p 826).

They argue that inclusive pedagogy is predicated upon teacher’s knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about learners in addition to how they respond to students experiencing barriers to learning and that ‘...inclusive pedagogy is defined not in the *choice* of strategy but in its *use*’ (ibid, p 820).

Thus, inclusive pedagogy is good pedagogy, as good teaching is good teaching for all (Nind, 2005).

### Learning styles and inclusive pedagogy

Mackay (2005) argues that inclusive pedagogy with non-specialist teachers in the classroom should be based on learning styles and preferences, particularly advocating the sensory VAK (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) model and Gardner’s ‘Multiple Intelligences’ theory. He makes the point that teachers, already working hard, don’t have the time to develop expertise in particular areas of student need, but argues that there are common elements across the spectrum of specific learning difference that can be applied to classroom management, delivery and teaching style.

The use of learning styles in education is currently very popular and seen as part of individualisation or personalisation of learning amongst students generally, although it is particularly advocated as an effective strategy for learners labelled as dyslexic (Mackay, 2005, Cooper, 2007). Also supporting this approach to pedagogy is Exley (2003), who researched the effectiveness of learning styles with students labelled as dyslexic and reported that all students involved in the study demonstrated improvements in their

performance on tasks of maths and spelling, with most preferring a visuo-spatial/kinaesthetic learning style. However, a report by Coffield, et al (2004) commissioned by the Learning and Skills Research Centre, studying 13 learning styles from an identified 71, reported a number of criticisms such as the lack of objectivity and validity of many that relied upon quantitative measures for identification and the commercial interests inherent in some of the learning styles tests. Mortimore (2005) too, argues for caution in the application of learning styles due to the lack of consensus on the validity of approaches and the conflicting evidence as to whether teaching style should, in fact, be matched to student learning style.

Coffield et al (2004) highlight other issues, such as the context in which learning takes place and the resultant issues, particularly within a further education environment. For example, the diverse provision (length and content of courses), the nature of staffing (many part-time staff), staff development issues and lack of opportunity to discuss learning in further education.

In light of these issues, it thus appears more appropriate, as Coffield et al (2004) suggest, to focus not upon individual learning styles, but upon whether the institution meets the requirements of all learners. Students' views on learning styles and how far pedagogical practices in the case study college are inclusive or exclusive are discussed in Chapter 4.

### Multiple inclusions?

Such are the ambiguities that surround the concept of inclusion that Dyson (1999) proposes the concept of 'multiple inclusions' stemming from different theoretical ideas about inclusion. He identifies two discourses that constitute the 'rationale' for inclusion – the discourse of 'rights and ethics' and the 'efficacy' discourse. Thus, the rationale for inclusive education can be justified in terms of human rights and wider debates about justice and equity. Furthermore, this discourse is reinforced by a critique of the

effectiveness of segregated education. He also identifies two discourses that constitute the realisation of inclusion in practice – the ‘political’ discourse and the ‘pragmatic’ discourse. The political discourse reflects views that seek to challenge segregated educational practices and the vested interests that underpin them. The pragmatic discourse is concerned with describing the characteristics of inclusive processes and how inclusive education can be achieved. Dyson (1999) warns against any one particular discourse dominating. For example, taking a purely ‘rights’ based position may argue for the right for a particular geographical placement and may not necessarily be concerned with appropriate provision. This highlights the complexities of the arguments and requires further discussion of the justification for asserting students’ rights to an inclusive education.

### The right to be included?

The development of legislation and policies to promote inclusive processes would lead one to assume that there is general agreement that inclusion is a good thing. There are certainly powerful ethical and philosophical arguments for inclusion in education, with Norwich (2007) stating that ‘It is rare to find arguments against inclusion, as it is rare to find arguments against democracy’ (p71). Nonetheless, he points out that difficulties and debates do arise, particularly when considering the nature and extent of inclusion.

The rights based discourse, as embedded in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), has given much impetus to the inclusion movement. The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (2008b) too, argues that it is a human rights and moral issue to embrace the diversity of every individual in the classroom. However, Lindsay, (2007), argues that it is not sufficient to subscribe to inclusive education on the basis of ‘rights’ without considering its efficacy. Implementing the legislative rights of students to participate in equitable educational opportunities is difficult if it is not perceived to work from a practical perspective. Thus, whilst it may be argued that students labelled as dyslexic have a human, moral and legislative right to be included, it is not sufficient, as Dyson (1999) posits, to

assert a rights discourse in isolation. Issues of efficacy too, form the basis of the rationale for inclusion.

Dyson, et al (2004) point to the plethora of international studies that demonstrate that inclusive settings have no negative impact upon the achievement of learners. For example, Lipsky and Gartner (1996) in a review of 20 studies, found significant benefits of an inclusive education in terms of academic, behavioural and social outcomes. Dyson, et al (2004) conclude that there is evidence that both high attainment and high levels of inclusive practice can be achieved in educational settings and suggest that maybe schools have improved performance due developing the ability to accommodate individual differences. Similarly, Ainscow (2005) asserts that the schools initiative with which he has been involved - 'Improving the Quality of Education for All' – with its focus upon developing teaching and learning practices, 'provides strong evidence of how inclusive school improvement can be achieved' (p3). He acknowledges that the process often involves challenging practitioners' beliefs and views that certain learners are somehow 'deficient'. Thus, whilst there is little evidence to suggest that inclusion does not work (efficacy discourse), strong moral and ethical arguments in support of inclusive education (rights discourse) and research on how inclusive practice can be developed (pragmatic discourse), there remain significant challenges in realising inclusive processes in practice. It therefore appears useful to take into consideration multiple discourses of inclusion in an effort to illuminate the factors that contribute to students' experiences of inclusion in the case study college and why students' rights may not always be realised in practice.

### Who should be included?

A further issue with the definition of inclusion is that of who is to be included. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), whilst concerned with the education of those described as having 'special needs', argues for the inclusion of '...all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties...' (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix).

Others too, (Booth, 1996, Allan, 2008), perceive that the definition of inclusion should encompass *all* learners. This, however, creates a dilemma for some. Norwich (2007), argues that there is a danger in this broad based approach that the needs of this particular group of learners who are experiencing difficulties in learning may be ignored or overlooked. Similarly, Tomlinson (FEFC, 1996), whilst acknowledging that genuinely inclusive processes would mean that this group of learners would be indistinguishable from others in terms of the management of their learning, argues that some safeguarding needs to be in place for them, in terms of the provision of additional funding, to ensure they receive the necessary resources. This creates its own difficulties in terms of issues of equity, particularly relating to students labelled as dyslexic and is a subject to which I return in Chapter 5 when discussing the data.

Whilst I concur with the views of Booth, (1996) and Allan, (2008) and subscribe to the definition of the inclusion of all learners, my research is focusing upon the inclusion of a particular group of learners labelled as dyslexic. It is hoped that the focus upon inclusive issues as they relate to a particular group can contribute to the wider debate on the inclusion of all learners in education.

### Models of disability

Much of the impetus for more inclusive processes has emerged from the experiences of disabled people in terms of their social exclusion and their struggle to redefine their experiences as created not by individual impairment but by barriers in society. This led to the emergence of different ways - or models - of thinking about disability.

It is argued that prevailing perceptions and attitudes towards disability are based upon a personal tragedy view, whereby disability is regarded as the result of an individual impairment (Finkelstein, 2004). The medical profession and social workers have long held this view, or the view that disability was a result of the limitations of activity caused by the

impairment (Thomas, 2004). As a result of their experiences of social exclusion, however, disabled people have more recently sought to challenge and redefine the concept of 'disability' as socially produced and thus break this causal link. Disability was redefined as social disadvantage arising from barriers to employment, education, transport, buildings, etc. (Thomas, 2004). The medical model of disability was rejected in favour of a social model of disability. This is a term coined by Oliver in 1983, who took on board the distinction between impairment and disability made by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). UPIAS (1976) described disability as '... something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society' (p14). Oliver distinguished between the individual model and the social model of disability, the former locating the problem within the individual, the latter locating it within society (Oliver, 1996). The social model, according to Barton (2003), provides an explanation of disability in terms of wider socio-economic factors and provides a means of challenging inequality and exclusion, in contrast to dominant perceptions of disability which legitimise barriers in policy and practice. This perspective, he argues, views disability not as tragic or requiring a cure or charity, but as an issue of human rights.

Nevertheless, the social model, and in particular Oliver's (1990) assertion that disability is a uniquely social phenomenon, is not without its critics. For example, Low (2001) attacks this perspective for its exclusivity, arguing that disability is multifaceted and complex and cannot be reduced to this one dimension. Others, too, (Swain and French, 2003, Crow, 2003) argue that the social model ignores the individual experience of impairment. In defence, Oliver (2004) maintains that the model is not a theory or concept. Rather, it should be conceived as a practical tool to effect social and political change. Thus, in terms



of addressing issues of justice and equity, the social model is concerned with how society removes barriers embedded in institutional processes, the environment and attitudes.

In this regard, viewed as a practical tool rather than a theory, the social model appears to offer a useful perspective for my study in helping to explain experiences of discrimination and exclusion and highlighting ways in which more inclusive processes can be developed.

### The medical gaze

Linked to the issue of barriers embedded in institutional processes, a further theoretical perspective on inclusion is offered by Foucault (1977). His work on prisons, medicine and psychiatry is of some relevance to an analysis of how students in educational institutions experiencing difficulties in learning are constructed and perceived. Foucault was concerned with concepts of power, discipline and punishment in institutional settings. One disciplinary technique, he argued, was that of the 'gaze'. The 'medical gaze' is focused upon the observation of the body and in gaining knowledge of signs and symptoms to link to disease, thus imbuing doctors with power. This medical gaze is analogous to the deficit orientated approach to dyslexia, whereby 'signs' and 'symptoms' of deficiencies within the individual are sought.

A further disciplinary technique, according to Foucault (1977), is that of surveillance, comprising hierarchical observation, normalizing judgements and the examination. Hierarchical observation involves the supervision of those who are doing the surveillance. The 'examination', he asserts, is the focal technique of power and knowledge. An analogy can be drawn between this and the assessment process to which students labelled as dyslexic are subjected. This assessment involves 'measuring' a student's attainments against the 'norm' in order to ascertain their 'difference' from this norm that results in a label entitling them to additional resources. Indeed, this is precisely my role in college – one for which I have been trained. The difficulty, as Allan (1996) posits and as I am

acutely aware, is that there are no clear cut-off points that delineate students who require additional support. Thus, from one assessor or institution to another, decisions and practices will vary, illustrating the inherently social processes at play, and ultimately the inequity of such an imprecise system. The dyslexia label becomes a means of acquiring scarce resources, thus 'distance from the norm has become valued' (Allan, 1996, p223). The assessor is vested with power and knowledge.

As this research is concerned with illuminating the factors that enhance and inhibit equitable experiences in education, Foucault's perspectives on power, discipline and punishment may help to illuminate the interests being served by particular mechanisms. For example, can systems in the case study college be linked to the 'medical gaze'? Are professionals making decisions that affect the lives of students?

Whilst Foucault may be criticised for his lack of empirical research in institutions and for omitting to provide instruction on how to effect transformations in practice (Allan, 1996), I nevertheless consider a Foucauldian perspective has a contribution to make in helping to understand the experiences of students labelled as dyslexic. Examining whether students are listened to, or whether discipline, power and punishment are utilized to reinforce dominant values, may offer some useful insights and assist in highlighting barriers to inclusive processes.

### Voice

The history of disability politics has been characterised by an engagement with voice as disabled people participate in decisions that will hugely impact their lives (Barton, 1998). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), states that children (defined as those under age 18) have a right to freely express views on matters that pertain to them (Article 12). It is therefore a human right to have a voice and to be listened to. Having a voice is to be human; it is to be a person (Gilligan, 1993).

With regard to education, Rudd, et al (2006) posit that the research on learner voice indicates that when learners are not engaged in influencing their educational experiences, they become disengaged and disillusioned. In contrast, there are huge benefits to all stakeholders when students are involved in decisions about their own learning. Learner voice is about '...empowering learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests and needs in order to develop educational experiences better suited to those individuals (Rudd et al, 2006, p8). In addition, if research is not to be irrelevant and contribute to disabling barriers, if it is to improve their material circumstances, an alternative set of research practices is called for, one which involves developing an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Oliver, 1992). Relatively little research investigating students labelled as dyslexic has actually listened to the voices of the learners themselves, with traditional approaches locating the source of the difficulties experienced within the individual (Slee, 1998). By focusing upon the learner voice, this study thus seeks to promote learners' participation and inclusion in the research process. There are therefore many justifications for respecting and giving prominence to the learner voice, from a variety of perspectives. It is a moral and rights imperative; it benefits learners and educational institutions and it can help to create more appropriate educational experiences for learners. Fielding and Ruddock (2002) maintain there is huge potential for the student voice to change learning environments. Certainly, learner voice activities such as focus groups are now routinely part of the case study college practices and indeed FE practice generally. This is due, though, in no small measure, to the fact that it is part of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) Inspection framework. Ofsted (2011) consider that engaging in dialogue with learners is evidence that learners are central to the development of provision.

However, a significant issue, as Fielding and Ruddock (2002) state, is whether we are listening in an 'authentic' way or whether existing power relations are being maintained

under the guise of ‘listening’. As Gilligan (1993) asserts, listening to voice can be ‘an instrument for understanding the psychological, cultural and social order’ (p. xvi). These debates raise issues about whether the case study college is listening to serve the college interests or genuinely empowering learners to engage in changing their learning environment. Analysis of data from the participants in this study (in chapters 4 and 5) can shed light on these issues.

I consider it vital to give prominence to the learner voice in this study, for the potential it has to help effect improvements in their learning environment in terms of the development of more inclusive processes in FE. The following section traces the historical development of processes of inclusion in FE, with regard to legislation and policy.

### **Inclusion in FE – legislative and policy drivers**

As result of its varied functions, as mentioned previously, it could be argued that FE has been in a unique position to foster inclusive processes to respond to the requirements of a diverse range of learners for some considerable time (James and Biesta, 2007).

Implementation of the legislation and policy, though, has been rather slow.

Mackay (2005) posits that inclusive processes will work if driven by policy. Educational policy is generally viewed as ‘a specification of principles and actions, related to educational issues, which are followed or which should be followed and which are designed to bring about desired goals (Trowler, 2003, p95). It could be argued that this viewpoint perhaps assumes policy making to be a rational, objective act of choosing the best way to respond to a problem. In reality, it may be perceived as much more of a process – a political process - with various groups, ideologies and interests competing for input (Trowler, 2003). Thus, inevitably, the creation and implementation of policy will be beset by a plethora of difficulties, contradictions and ambiguities (Rix and Simmons, 2005). Whilst there has been much growth and acknowledged improvements in policy and

legislation related to inclusion in FE, the fact remains that there are still many barriers to disabled students' learning (Disability Rights Commission, 2003). It is my assertion that ensuring that learners labelled as dyslexic gain access to education on an equal footing to their peers goes beyond merely the creation of legislation and policy. An outline of the history and development of key drivers now follows, which illustrates the complexity of the processes involved in developing and implementing inclusive policies in FE.

### The Warnock Report (1978)

The Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science (DES), 1978) was the first report to suggest post-compulsory education for learners experiencing difficulties in learning. The concept of 'special educational needs' was introduced, in an effort to focus attention upon the educational needs of learners rather than upon the disability. A small, but significant section of the report was devoted to post 16 education, arguing that education beyond compulsory school leaving age be available for learners experiencing difficulties in learning, in 6<sup>th</sup> forms and further education colleges. It stated that '...wherever possible young people with special needs should be given the necessary support to enable them to attend ordinary courses of further education' (DES, 1978, p174). Whilst this was an important development in responding to the requirements of these learners, the language appears to skirt around the issues, rather than directly address the problem. Whether intentional or not, the consequence was that institutions could legitimately opt out of implementing the recommendations. For example, the phrase in the above recommendation 'wherever possible' is open to interpretation and leaves it open for some institutions to perhaps declare that it is not possible. A further recommendation was that colleges offer modified courses for some learners, and that 'some establishments of further education should provide special vocational courses' (p174). The implication is that the expectation is not on all establishments, and exactly which establishments is not clear, leaving room for colleges again to choose not to take up the recommendation. The

conviction was expressed in the report that with more sympathetic staff attitudes, the needs of the majority of learners could be met in regular courses without the need for huge amounts of additional resources. This vision, however, could be said to represent a particular version or interpretation of inclusion - that of learners being educated 'under the same roof' – it does not necessarily equate that these learners' requirements will be met. Similarly, a 'sympathetic' (p174) attitude on behalf of staff perhaps ignores staff training issues and the change in cultural attitudes and classroom practices needed to meet the requirements of a diverse range of learners.

Thus, whilst the Warnock Report marked a major development in the progress towards the education of learners experiencing difficulties, the emphasis was upon the geographical location of learners, suggesting that integration into the 'mainstream' of further education was the way forward in responding to the requirements of these learners, with little consideration given to changes in curriculum and pedagogy that may be required. In addition, much of the language of the rather limited coverage of FE provision in the report is vague and equivocal, giving broad scope for a lack of implementation of its recommendations. Finally, the issue of the rights of learners experiencing difficulties in learning to the same educational opportunities as their peers - a fundamental tenet of inclusion – was not in evidence throughout the report. It was not until 1992 that they would be acknowledged in law.

### The Further and Higher Education Act (1992)

This Act was the first educational legislation to recognise this group of learners, strengthening the case for students' rights to an education post 16, stating that providers had a duty to 'have regard' for learners experiencing difficulties with learning. Nevertheless, the language was again somewhat vague – what was meant by having 'regard' was not explicit and left much room for the continuing exclusion of learners from further education opportunities. Indeed, it was still legal at this point, as Lavender and

Cooper (2006) point out, to refuse a person a place on a course on the basis of a label of a difficulty with learning. This Act also made colleges independent of local education authorities, and the government encouraged principals to adopt a business-like entrepreneurial approach in responding to market forces. Many responsibilities previously held by the local education authority were transferred into the hands of the Further Education Funding Councils (FEFC) of England, Scotland and Wales whose remit was to drive up standards of education in the sector whilst maintaining a tight fiscal control of budgets (Johnstone, 1995). The FEFC was replaced by The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2001, who maintained that their approach to learners was holistic and person-centred, aimed at meeting individual needs (LSC, 2006). College principals, though, have had to respond to the government's calls for higher standards, continuous improvement and achievement of targets which, Norton Grubb (2005) suggests, has led to diverting attention away from the holistic, educational and caring needs of the students, to a focus upon competition, recruitment and fiscal issues, and viewing the students as merely 'walking bags of funding units' (Norton Grubb, 2005, p. 26).

It is thus apparent that the rhetoric of policy is not necessarily realised in practice with contradictory discourses in evidence. Competition for students in FE is aggressive, and the case study college is not immune to market forces. Its policy of attracting high achievers (as mentioned, it has high minimum entry requirements for its level 3 courses) is a result of the political context in which it operates in terms of the pressures of meeting government targets and the increasing marketisation of education and league tables. This may be perceived as contradictory to the notions of widening participation, also promoted by the government, what Slee and Allan (2005) refer to as 'contextual disconnection' (p16) – inclusion is promoted without an appreciation of the political context in which it operates. This results in 'low achievers' and those requiring much support and resources being perceived as less attractive to educational institutions (Ainscow, et al 2006). Thus, whilst

ostensibly the college promotes the message that all learners are welcomed, it becomes apparent in this context why maybe some learners are welcomed more than others. The ramifications of these fundamental changes to the operation of FE have been widespread and influential, significantly affecting the provision of equity of educational opportunities, often in opposition to inclusive processes. These issues are given greater consideration in the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5.

The policies of the case study college and of FE are framed not just at a local and national level, but operate within an international framework. The influence of global policy upon inclusive processes is illustrated by the Salamanca Statement.

### The Salamanca Statement

Integration was the buzz word of the 1980s and 90s, following on from the recommendations of the Warnock Report in 1978. Subsequently, disillusionment with the idea and practice of integration in the 1990s led to the concept of inclusive education gaining ground. This was fuelled by the international commitment to inclusion outlined in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). This argued for the 'right' of all children to education, advocating that they should be educated in regular schools and for schools to change so that systems are designed to provide for such a diverse range of needs. It placed inclusion on the international agenda, albeit according to Ainscow et al (2006), at a somewhat rhetorical level. It has been described as a 'deeply ambiguous document' (Dyson, 1999, p46), due to its absolutist assertions and lack of clarification of concepts such as 'child centred pedagogy' (ibid). The Salamanca Statement is yet another example of the complexities of policy. Apparently simple descriptions belie the inherent complexity and multiplicity of meanings they may generate, which in turn affects its implementation, often contrary to policymakers' intentions (Trowler, 2003). Nevertheless, inclusion was now perceived as a global commitment. Further impetus for the development of inclusive processes specifically for the FE sector would be seen a couple of years later.



### The Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996)

Following a national inquiry into provision in FE for disabled students and students experiencing difficulties in learning, the move towards more inclusive practices was fuelled with the publication of this seminal report. The Further Education Funding Council Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee chaired by Professor John Tomlinson, produced the report *Inclusive Learning*, commonly referred to as the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996), which outlined a radical vision for improving students' experiences. It defined inclusion as '...the greatest degree of match or fit between the individual learner's requirements and the provision that is made for them.' (p26). It stated that it '...does not consider inclusive learning to be the same thing as 'integration' or 'including students'...' (p32). Rather, inclusion '...shifts responsibility from the student to the sector, colleges and teachers. It is they that must fit or match themselves to students rather than the other way round' (FEFC, 1996, p32). This marked a change in perspective from locating the difficulties within the individual to a social perspective where the college and its teachers were responsible for responding to individual needs and creating an appropriate environment for learning. This report radically brought the issues into focus, listening to students and proposing significant changes to develop the effectiveness of colleges in responding to a diversity of learners' requirements, by means of restructuring college provision to match the needs of learners.

In spite of this, research into current practice - for example, reports from ALI (2006) and Foster (2005), suggest that little progress has been made in FE generally since Tomlinson's comments in 1996. They point to issues such as many FE teachers' lack of awareness of the multiplicity of ways students learn, and the need for staff development. This has obvious implications for both teacher training and staff development within the FE sector, suggesting another strand to the multiplicity of factors that can impact upon inclusive processes. In addition, it is often easier to address needs at an individual level as in the

medical model, than try to change the system (Wray and Houghton, 2007), which is what the social model underpinning the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) advocates. The legacy of older discourses can operate alongside newer ones, thus contributing to the gap between policy in theory and policy in practice (Houghton, et al, 2006). Slee (1997), offering a sociological perspective, posits that whilst the language may have changed, there has been no major re-theorising of special education. Consequently those with a vested interest in special education have been able to ‘...demonstrate professional resilience in blending dominant disabling discourses into a language of inclusion’ (Slee, 1997, p407). It is interesting for me to consider whether the use of language in the case study college is merely a linguistic sleight of hand that superficially makes all the right noises in presenting a veneer of inclusion, but in reality merely subsumes traditional power relations, discourses, policies and practice under a different name. How far has the college restructured to accommodate difference and how far is it able, willing or prepared to restructure to further inclusive processes? Most importantly, what needs to change? These questions are addressed in the course of analysis of the data.

In addition, individuals interpret policy according to their own frames of reference, their values and perceptions. Thus, in such a large organisation, where there is likely to exist a wide variety of experiences and attitudes, implementing these policies and effecting change can be problematical. Practice will not necessarily correspond with the policy, and indeed, differences will be apparent across different parts of the institution reflecting differing levels of awareness and centrality of the issues amongst staff (Houghton, et al, 2006). This results in patchy implementation of policy and provision. Furthermore, the diverse teacher training and preparation for working in FE and varying levels of qualifications, knowledge and experience of staff has wide ranging implications for the management of such changes as are required in developing the practices of inclusion in this environment. Thus, the intentions of the Tomlinson Report may not necessarily be

reflected in practice. Furthermore, whilst the Report was a key document in influencing policy and practice towards students experiencing difficulties in learning, including those labelled as dyslexic, it did not consider issues of human rights (CSIE, 2008b). Like the Warnock Report of 1978, it contained many suggestions and recommendations, but left much room for non implementation. Legislation, at this point, was still several years away.

### The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (2001)

This Act came into force in 2002, amending the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) which had, until then, exempted the education sector. It placed legislative responsibilities upon governors and staff in post 16 institutions not to discriminate against students defined as disabled under the Act. Disability included ‘...hidden impairments (for example, mental illness or mental health problems, learning difficulties, dyslexia...)’ (Disability Rights Commission (DRC) (2003), p7). Thus dyslexia was considered a disability in the legislation. Discrimination can occur when someone is treated less favourably on the basis of their disability without justification and when a reasonable adjustment is not made to avoid a disabled person being placed at a substantial disadvantage in relation to someone who is not disabled (ibid). SENDA has since been replaced by the Equality Act (2010), although the two main duties for institutions under SENDA - not to treat someone less favourably and to provide reasonable adjustments - still remain under the Equality Act. Yet, implementation of these duties is not straightforward. Again, the language used in the legislation is problematic. What constitutes ‘reasonable’ is open to interpretation and subject to much debate. Barriers to learning that students labelled as dyslexic experience, such as inaccessible worksheets and being expected to take notes at speed (Pavey, et al, 2010) are often in opposition to inclusive practices the legislation seeks to promote.

This is an example of what is referred to as the ‘intention-reality gap’. Policies may just not be implemented, or implemented unsuccessfully – that is, not producing the intended outcomes (Edwards, 2001). Little clear guidance is offered to institutions on the

implementation of the legislation, with clarity perhaps only being given once a case for discrimination by a college is brought before the courts.

In the case study college policies have developed over the years for a variety of reasons and are part of a web of policies, not just at a national level but within the college itself. For example, there is a Learning Support Policy Statement which was written in 1994 in preparation for an inspection and a Disability Statement that was written in 1995 in response to the DDA. Others include the Equality and Diversity Policy and the Strategic Plan for the college. Each embodies a set of assumptions and values in the language and terminology used. Questions about who wrote the policies, who was consulted, for whom they are intended, and how they link together and support each other in the promotion of inclusive practices are important in understanding the construct of the inclusive college.

The policy of conducting impact assessments, a legal requirement since December 2006, was implemented to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are assessed from the outset and regularly reviewed, in order to avoid discrimination and minimise potential barriers to learning. Whilst compliance with the policy can be attempted in a variety of ways such as legal enforcement, again, it does not guarantee enactment as the policymakers may have intended (Edwards, 2001). There is often the need for obedience and control rather than trust to implement policy (ibid), although it has to be questioned whether obedience and control are attainable or even desirable, from a moral standpoint. Edwards (2001) suggests it leads to policy failure. As Hammersley (2005) comments, the creators of policy at national level often have little control over how the policy is subsequently implemented.

Effective leadership and the commitment of senior management are seen to be key elements in the effective management of change (Rose and Faraday, 2006; DRC, 2003). Clearly, a top- down approach to facilitating change is advocated. On the other hand,

Edwards (2001) warns of the impact upon teaching staff that changes in policy can have – a constant stream of new initiatives can lead to merely superficial change, resistance or non-compliance if staff perceive that the policy is not appropriate, or that they have not been consulted or involved in the decision making process. Therefore, a collaborative approach to policy making could be advantageous in the management of change. The views of stakeholders in this study can contribute to this debate and are discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

### The Little Report: 'Through Inclusion to Excellence' (LSC, 2005)

In 2005, the LSC commissioned a comprehensive review on provision for students experiencing difficulties with learning in post 16 education – the first of its kind since the publication of the Tomlinson Report 'Inclusive Learning'. Thirteen years after Tomlinson's recommendations, the review found that the quality of provision remains 'highly variable' (LSC, p2). It concluded that although it was expected that there would be parity of experience for these learners in mainstream classrooms, it was difficult to assess whether this was happening. In addition, the report identified that the learner voice was still underutilised as a means of understanding and responding to learners' requirements and informing curriculum planning and delivery. The report made a number of recommendations, including promoting a national strategy involving systemic change in order to expand the delivery of high quality local provision for these learners.

### Leitch Review and Foster Review

Also in 2005, the government commissioned the Leitch Review – a report into the implications for policy of the future skill requirements of the UK economy. The review highlighted the lack of qualifications of disabled people, noting that over 40% have no qualifications at all (Ofsted, 2007). The government also investigated the role of FE colleges in the future with the Foster Review (2005), concluding that FE must strive to

improve teaching and learning and that colleges must employ systematic methods of gathering learner views to help to improve provision.

Whilst there have been many policy initiatives with regard to developing inclusive provision in line with the Tomlinson Report, research has tended to neglect the perspectives of learners (Anderson, et al, 2003). As the reviews above illustrated, the learner voice is significantly lacking in informing policy and provision. In their national study, 'Count me in FE', Anderson, et al (2003) sought the views of learners on their experiences in FE. With regard to student voice they found that although some learners felt that they were listened to, most were unaware of the results of consultations and were unsure whether their concerns were acted upon, indicating the need for more effective systems of gathering information on learner views and disseminating the results to students. In addition, the less confident or articulate learner had little opportunity to be heard and thus have their requirements met.

Subsequently, Richards, et al (2007) conducted research aimed at addressing some of these issues, suggesting effective ways of listening to all learners and utilising the learner voice to contribute to the development policy and provision for those experiencing difficulties in learning. Strategies included phone texting, encouraging students to take photographs of where they felt safe or unsafe and role play. They found that what worked best was employing a range of strategies to ensure that all learners were able to contribute and be heard. The methods employed to listen effectively to learners in this study are discussed in Chapter 3.

Thus, whilst there have been very welcome developments in policy and legislation in FE in recent years, the area remains problematic. There is no guarantee that learners labelled as dyslexic will receive an equitable educational experience, despite their rights being enshrined in legislation. The quality of inclusive provision in the sector, as mentioned, is

patchy (LSC, 2005). This suggests that merely having rights in law is not sufficient to ensure inclusive processes for students labelled as dyslexic. Other factors require consideration.

I now turn to a discussion of the various ways of theorising about dyslexia and the contributions the perspectives make in facilitating or creating barriers to inclusive processes.

### **The concept of dyslexia**

The word 'dyslexia' is of intense interest to educationalists, researchers, medical professionals, the public and the media and is characterised by confusion and controversy (Reid, 1998). In widespread use, the term is generally used to describe people experiencing difficulties with reading, and also with spelling and writing. Fawcett (2002) states that a major controversy surrounds the notion of this group of learners being singled out as 'special' and thus being treated differently to other learners experiencing difficulties with reading. This has led to debates about the existence of the syndrome, illustrated by claims in the media that dyslexia is 'a myth' (Elliott, 2005, p18) and 'a fantasy' (Hitchens, 2007, p31). It is often perceived as a middle-class phenomenon adopted by parents to hide the embarrassment of underachievement, used an excuse for poor literacy skills. 'If you live in Acacia Avenue you are dyslexic, if you live in Gasworks Terrace you are thick' (Crabtree, 1975, in Ott, 1997, p2). Elliott and Gibbs (2008) argue that the term dyslexia is 'an arbitrarily and largely socially defined construct' (p488) that hinders rather than facilitates appropriate responses to the issue of literacy difficulties, as it differentiates between poor readers and those with a dyslexia label, leading to inequity of provision and resources.

From my experience, I concur with the sentiments of Fawcett (2002) that there remains much confusion amongst the public, including teachers, about what it is. This confusion is facilitated in no small part by tensions between various stakeholders' and interest groups'

perspectives (ibid). This is perhaps understandable when one considers that there is no single definition of dyslexia. There are definitions put forward by advocacy groups such as Dyslexia Action and the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), by practitioners such as the British Psychological Society (BPS) and by researchers, all of whom have various interests and thus approach the concept from different perspectives. The level of disagreement within these definitions as to what constitutes dyslexia is, as Rice and Brooks (2004) put it, 'verging on anarchy' (p16).

A recent definition was created by the Expert Advisory Group on the Rose Review (Rose, 2009), who produced a working definition of dyslexia after examining the many published definitions. This definition is detailed below.

**Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.**

- Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.
- Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.
- It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.
- Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.
- A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention.

**Figure 2.1: Working definition of dyslexia (Rose, 2009)**



Whilst this definition offers detailed information and may be of utility to tutors in FE in, for example, assisting in recognising students who may be experiencing difficulties in learning, it does reinforce an 'individual deficit' perspective. This is important because a particular conceptualisation of dyslexia has implications for responses to learners labelled as dyslexic and these responses can either facilitate or hinder inclusive processes.

What follows is a review of the main perspectives on dyslexia in order to illustrate how the various ways of theorising about dyslexia inform differing responses to addressing the requirements of these learners.

### Biological deficit perspective

Dyslexia has been framed within a medical discourse since the earliest discussions of the concept in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Riddick, 2001). Current research too, tends to concentrate upon biological factors that cause dyslexia. The three main theories are the phonological deficit theory (difficulties with the processing of sounds), magnocellular deficit (deficiencies in the sensory pathways taking messages from the eyes and ears to the brain) and cerebellar deficit theory (problems with the part of the brain responsible for skills such as automaticity and balance) (Reid and Fawcett, 2004). These theories imply that there is something lacking or deficient in learners labelled as dyslexic and that it is biological in origin.

School responses to literacy difficulties include an emphasis upon developing phonological skills as evidenced in the National Literacy Strategy and schemes such as reading recovery (Riddick, 2001). Advocacy groups such as the British Dyslexia Association argue that this group of learners require additional, specialised support (Feiler and Gibson, 1999).

Krupska and Klein, (1995) too, state that these learners learn best via individual, structured specialist tuition. A diagnostic assessment is required to pinpoint difficulties in learning, in order to inform the teaching programme. This both reflects and reinforces a medical or deficit discourse. This conceptualisation of dyslexia focuses upon the individual's

‘difficulties’ with a variety of tasks, the implication being that support needs to be provided by others in order for the individual to be able to function adequately (the student relying on help from a classroom assistant to take notes, for example). The influence of this discourse cannot be underestimated. For example, Holloway (2001) found that, in higher education, this individualised approach created many barriers to access to information and support for learners – the onus was upon the learner to find out information and arrange their support.

### Difference theory of dyslexia

Although much research places emphasis upon dyslexia as a deficit, an alternative approach has emerged relatively recently that conceptualises dyslexia as a difference in cognitive processing. Mackay (2005) describes dyslexia as a specific learning difference which, he argues, focuses attention upon inclusive strategies implemented by tutors in the classroom through reasonable adjustments, rather than ‘remediation’ of the individual by learning support staff. Taking this approach enables recognition of an individual’s strengths, such as creativity and verbal ability (ibid), as a result of differences in cognitive skills. Singleton (1999) too, emphasises the importance of focusing upon an individual’s strengths and weaknesses rather than ‘deficits’, suggesting that dyslexia is now much more widely recognised as ‘a difference in cognition and learning’ (p27). This approach maintains the utility of the label, but argues instead for a reconceptualisation of the understanding of dyslexia as a difference rather than a difficulty, to enable appreciation of positive characteristics.

### Social Model theory of dyslexia

Linked to the social model of disability espoused by Oliver (1983), the social model of dyslexia takes the perspective that it is the value that is currently attached to literacy skills in society that transform the impairments underlying dyslexia into difficulties (Riddick, 2001). This perspective challenges dominant literacy practices and assumptions - for

example the assumption that good literacy skills equate with intelligence. Particular types of literacy skills can be perceived as a marker of intelligence; consequently, those without such skills are assumed to be lacking in intelligence (DfES, 2004).

With regard to FE, there is certainly much emphasis placed upon the achievement of a particular level of literacy, both to qualify for admission to college and to progress within college. The cultural norms attached to literacy may therefore have an impact upon experiences of inclusion and exclusion of students labelled as dyslexic.

Cooper (2000) too, advocates a move away from a medical construction of dyslexia requiring diagnosis and remediation, towards a social model, where he argues the consideration should be on how to obtain a fit between how the learner learns, what they want to learn and the environment in which they learn. This, he contends, is the inclusive learning model proposed by Tomlinson (FEFC, 1996). The most important difference between learners is not in their reading, spelling or writing ability, but in the way they think and learn. This leads to a consideration of each individual's strengths and weaknesses and learning styles, rather than a labelling of the individual. Thus appropriate and meaningful learning opportunities can be provided and support in many ways then becomes irrelevant and unnecessary (Cooper, 2000). The issue of labelling students is controversial and pertinent to this study in terms of its influence upon the construction of inclusive processes.

### **Labelling and dyslexia**

Feiler and Gibson (1999) argue that the very process of giving students a label of dyslexia can be a major threat to inclusive processes, because its focus upon 'within child deficits' tends to ignore the contribution of curriculum and pedagogy in creating difficulties in learning. Furthermore, the process of labelling the students as 'failures' then legitimises the situation whereby these students are unable to secure a well-paid job (ibid), which can

result in social exclusion. From this perspective, the labelling process that stems from the deficit discourse can thus function as a highly exclusionary process, reproducing existing inequalities in society.

There are also arguments that a label is constructed not from psychological processes but from social interactions between teachers, students, parents and specialists (Christensen and Baker, 2005; McDermott, 1996; Allan, 2005; Benjamin et al, 2003). Those who are not perceived to adhere to the construct of the 'normal' learner are identified as 'different', warranting a label to explain why they do not appear to be conforming. It is, however, outside the scope of this study to debate the issues surrounding the acquisition of a label in detail. I am going beyond the label and focusing upon students' experiences in terms of barriers to learning.

Generally, there is often ambivalence towards the dyslexia label among students, particularly its status as a disability, which can have both positive and negative consequences (Farmer et al, 2002). On the one hand many students do not consider themselves to be disabled, but on the other hand they may need or want to adopt the disability label in order to secure resources (Houghton, et al, 2006). This suggests that students may accept a label of dyslexia for the benefits it brings in terms of access to otherwise denied funding and resources, although this legal recognition is no guarantee that their rights will be enforced and they will receive support they want. In FE, the YPLA (the funding agency for the sector) uses the additional learning support system inherited from the FEFC and the LSC which is built upon the principle of separate funding to meet the additional costs of support for learners identified as experiencing difficulties in learning. Thus, the medicalisation of dyslexia is welcomed by many, who see it as a necessary part of the process of securing this support and resources. That the legislation (SENDA, 2001), backed by the Disability Rights Commission, recognised dyslexia as a disability in legal terms, affords this group of learners protection from discrimination under

the law; thus 'disabled status' can be accepted as it facilitates the use of a 'rights' discourse (Johnson, 2004).

Krupska and Klein (1995) too, suggest that a label of dyslexia is not necessarily a negative experience, as many learners, particularly adult learners, have previously experienced labels such as 'lazy' or 'thick' which only contributed to their failure. A label of dyslexia, they assert, can lead to identification of strengths as well as weaknesses and positively change their perceptions of themselves. They contend that the assessment process is actually one of 'de-labelling'. Whether this strictly accurate I would suggest is debatable, as the process may be seen to merely replace one label with another. I find that whilst it may be true that for some learners a 'dyslexic' label is preferable to a 'thick' or 'lazy' label, it raises more issues as they then find themselves grappling with a word that, as discussed, has many connotations and implications. Learners may express genuine concerns about whether the label will, for example, prejudice their university application or jeopardise their employment position if they disclose. There are concerns about how they will now be perceived by their family, peers and teachers. Madriaga (2007) found that students responded differently to disclosing their learning difficulty – whilst some felt comfortable about telling others, others did not as they did not want to be perceived negatively.

Labelling can have very negative and exclusionary consequences, particularly if the label serves to locate the problem with the individual, as it then diverts attention away from the limitations and failures of the institution (Christensen, 1996). The evidence therefore suggests that there is a need to exercise great caution when using labels. In addition, students labelled as dyslexic are not a homogenous group. An appropriate response for one student (e.g. the provision of reading software), may be less appropriate for another student. Other factors such as gender, race, age and socio-economic background also form part of their identity and personality that makes each person a unique individual with

different motivations and requirements. Despite this, assessment and identification of differences in learning can help the student reframe their self perceptions, through understanding the difficulties they are experiencing and appreciating their strengths (Klein, 2003), in addition to offering the tutor information on how to respond appropriately in the classroom. In FE, within the current funding system, having a label of dyslexia may help to reduce barriers to learning by enabling the provision of appropriate support and reasonable adjustments. I would, nevertheless, concur with Cooper (2000) that regardless of the label, what is crucial is a consideration of each individual's strengths and weaknesses and learning styles in order to provide appropriate and meaningful learning opportunities.

What is evident in the literature is that presenting the issue of whether a label is positive or negative in such a dichotomous way belies the complexities of the processes involved. Nonetheless, it is clear that how dyslexia is conceptualised influences responses and it is important that perceptions do not reinforce negative attitudes and create barriers to learning. As Benjamin (2002) states, to assume that we are operating in neutral territory with neutral language is 'a dangerous fiction' (p3). The language we use has wide ranging consequences for policy and provision and ultimately impacts upon students' experiences of inclusion in education. In this study I am going beyond the label to ascertain the concerns of students regarding barriers to their learning, rather than focusing upon the construction of dyslexia from a medical perspective.

### **Barriers to learning in FE**

Despite the recommendations of the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) and implementation of legislation to strengthen the rights of learners in FE to equity of educational experiences, recent studies have found that barriers still persist, highlighting many factors contributing to the exclusion of students experiencing difficulties in learning in FE. Common factors are outlined below.

### Tutor skills and awareness

Some tutors are not confident or lack the relevant skills to respond appropriately to the requirements of learners experiencing difficulties in learning in FE. For example, Browne (2002) reported that unimaginative teaching created problems in learning in her case study of one particular student. She also noted that the student experienced success in classes where the tutors were engaged in continuous professional development that included training on learning styles and communication techniques. Whilst it would be difficult to generalise from the experience of one student in this study, the issue of staff training in FE was also highlighted by Heathcote and Brindley, (2006). Teachers in their study commented that teacher training courses provide insufficient preparation for teaching a diversity of learners – courses lack standardised training on issues such as identification of difficulties and inclusive teaching methods. High staff turnover in the FE sector also affects students' learning as it results in a loss of knowledge with the resultant need to constantly replenish expertise (ibid). Although staff may attempt to be helpful, they are not always very well informed (Ash et al, 1997). Tutor skills thus have a significant impact upon the construction of inclusive processes and this study investigates the experiences of stakeholders in the case study college to ascertain the extent to which these issues are impacting upon students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

### Learning support

It is argued that learning support, particularly the use of classroom assistants, plays a significant role in promoting positive learning experiences for students in FE (Madriaga, 2007, Farrell, 2000); yet some research has reported difficulties with the provision. Tutors can abdicate responsibility for the student's learning by leaving it to the support assistant (Mumford, 2006). Thus, this arrangement can disguise the need for tutors to alter their teaching approaches to respond to student diversity (Anderson, et al, 2003). In FE, this can be further exacerbated by the fact that many tutors arrive with the vocational experience to

teach, but may lack the teaching skills, particularly in addressing the needs of a diverse group of learners, leading to a reliance on centralised services.

Students also experience barriers to access to support. These barriers include not always being aware of the support available, resulting in reluctance to request help and a sensitivity to the location of the provision and its description – students were conscious of having to go away to ‘special rooms’ for ‘special help’ (Anderson et al, 2003, p24).

### School experiences

Students entering FE bring a set of prior experiences and expectations to the learning situation and particular dispositions which frame their approach to learning (James and Biesta, 2007). The literature (e.g. Singleton, 1996), indicates that for many students labelled as dyslexic, their school experiences have often been quite negative. Many students commented upon negative teacher attitudes (Anderson et al, 2003; Madriaga, 2007). This affected their confidence and self-esteem and contributed to low expectations of what to expect from their learning experiences at college (Anderson et al, 2003).

Madriaga (2007) reported that many students found discriminatory attitudes from teachers at school continued with tutors at college. These issues are likely to have an impact upon their experiences of inclusion and exclusion at college as the particular dispositions they bring to the learning situation can be ‘confirmed, developed, challenged or changed’ (James and Biesta, 2007, p33) .

### **Management of change in FE**

A fundamental issue in attempting to develop more inclusive processes for learners with a label of dyslexia is outlined by Dyson and Skidmore (1996). Institutions are expected to respond to national pressure for whole school or whole college approaches to inclusion, focusing upon developing mainstream curricula and classroom teaching methods to meet the needs of all learners. At the same time, for learners with a label of dyslexia,



individualised, ‘specialist’ provision is advocated, which is difficult to deliver in the mainstream classroom and potentially costly (ibid). Learning support teachers are thus faced with the dilemma of their commitment to collaborative working and liaison with classroom teachers alongside the expectation to be trained as ‘specialist’ teachers working with individual learners. Institutions also face the challenge of the equitable distribution of limited resources. In order for institutions to develop more inclusive processes, what is required is a means of reconciliation of these apparent contradictions and dilemmas.

However, research and guidance on how institutions might respond to these issues and organise themselves accordingly, is, according to Dyson and Skidmore (1996), significantly lacking. The literature offers little in the way of practical solutions to these dilemmas, particularly within the complex arena of further education. It is hoped that this research may contribute to this by making some suggestions for possible areas of change.

Skrtic (1991) provides what Dyson and Millward (2000) consider to be a largely philosophical solution to these many dilemmas and contradictions, with his promotion of ‘adhocratic’ rather than ‘bureaucratic’ institutions. This involves institutions in a complete reconstruction of discourses and practices so that diversity is viewed as a positive impetus to pool their expertise to solve problems through innovation. In this way, ‘excellence’ is achieved through ‘equity’ (Skrtic, 1991). However, as Dyson and Millward (2000) state, there is no mention in his theorising of what this would look like in practice – how institutions would organise and structure their pedagogy and learning. Ainscow (1999) provides a more descriptive account of what an inclusive institution would look like (Dyson and Millward, 2000), sharing some characteristics with Skrtic’s vision of collaborative problem solving and learning. He introduces the concept of schools on the move – the challenges of responding to new ideas creating argument and debate, resulting in the development of more inclusive processes.

This approach would not be without difficulties in FE. Ainscow's views are based upon effecting change in schools, which, as previously discussed, differ markedly to colleges in their organisation. His ideas of interdependent strategies, coordinated efforts and collaboration may be more difficult to transpose onto an FE system which, as outlined earlier, is characterised by departmentalism, bureaucracy and fluid staffing. In addition, Dyson and Millward (2000) argue that neither Skrtic's nor Ainscow's approach takes into account the politics or power relationships inherent in our education system. There will be some wishing to exert their power to maintain the status quo. The abolition of labelling and categorisation, for example, would be resisted by many, not least with regard to the dyslexia label (Feiler and Gibson, 1999). There are many powerful pressure groups and stakeholders ready to resist these moves towards greater inclusion, the distribution of limited resources being a major factor (ibid). Many parents, for example, support and actively encourage the process of assessing and labelling their child as dyslexic, in an effort to secure resources.

Dyson and Skidmore (1996) advocate a model of provision that views specific difficulties in learning not from a psychological or medical perspective, but as an issue of curriculum access. In this way, the emphasis is upon meeting the needs of these learners through classroom differentiation, building self esteem and developing learner autonomy to facilitate their inclusion in the classroom. In some instances, it may be necessary to target some support at individual skills, but they argue that this should be alongside these classroom strategies. This model thus promotes mainstream provision whilst acknowledging individual tuition as an additional strategy for some learners, rather than the dominant response to these learners' requirements.

Nevertheless, the enormity of the challenges in the management of such changes as are required to create more inclusive processes cannot be underestimated. It involves confronting and challenging dominant practices, discourses and power relationships. The

challenge within the case study college is the willingness with which it will embrace change if it is perceived to be highly successful with existing practices.

## Summary

The following key themes have been identified as emerging from the literature. Also provided is an explanation of how they have helped to frame my research questions, shape my theoretical perspective and inform my methodology.

- FE has grown and altered dramatically in recent years and has seen a significant increase in the number of disabled learners accessing further education. The increased marketization of FE has created tensions in attempting to respond effectively to the diversity of its learners and develop more inclusive processes. FE is under researched and there is little in the literature that examines the experiences of students labelled as dyslexic in the FE context.

This led me to consider the barriers to learning that students labelled as dyslexic may be experiencing in the case study college that are preventing their full inclusion. Full inclusion is defined as the *'full participation by all pupils in common classrooms and shared learning experiences'* (Dyson, et al, 2004).

In addition, the literature led me to consider the nature of FE generally and common strands across the sector that could be identified as contributing to students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Relating the experiences of the case study college back to the literature helped to inform a wider discussion on the implications for the sector.

- Arguments in support of inclusive processes in education - developing mainstream curricula and classroom teaching methods to meet the needs of all learners - are founded upon equality and human rights issues (CSIE, 2008b). Inclusion is driven by legislation and policy but implementation is problematic and not always as intended.

My role in college entails ensuring that students labelled as dyslexic receive their entitlements to support and reasonable adjustments. On a personal level, I am committed to equality of opportunity, justice and fairness. The literature, the legislation and my personal values lead me to adopt a theoretical perspective, as detailed in Chapter One, that views inclusion as a basic human right.

- Listening to the learner voice is a valuable way of learning about more inclusive processes and of making the research process more inclusive. Again, there is a gap in the existing literature on the voices of students labelled as dyslexic in FE.

I am drawn to the powerful arguments in support of bringing the student voice to the fore as a means of empowering students to facilitate changes to their learning environment. They have a right to be heard. As a methodology it helps to break down traditional power relations in research, promoting more inclusive research. As there is little existing literature, I can make a contribution to the body of knowledge in this area.

- Dyslexia is generally constructed from a deficit perspective, embedded in the medical model of disability. Responses to difficulties in learning based upon this model are focused upon ‘blaming’ the individual, which does not facilitate inclusive processes. In contrast, the social model locates barriers to learning within a wider context of political, economic and social factors, and seeks to challenge dominant institutional practices in an effort to create a more just and equitable society.

The literature has provided insights into the utility of particular models of dyslexia. The social model would appear useful in this study in identifying inclusive and exclusive processes, in an effort to develop the college’s ability to respond more effectively to the diversity of its learners. In addition, it is useful to identify how far deficit discourses of dyslexia influence college policy and provision, as the literature indicates that this discourse serves to perpetuate exclusive processes.

- Promoting inclusive processes involves change, but the literature appears lacking on the detail of such changes, particularly with regard to further education.

I need to consider the changes that are required in the case study college in order to promote more effective processes of inclusion. This aspect of the research too, can go some way to addressing the gaps in the body of knowledge in this area.

Thus, my research questions are as follows:

1. What are the factors that enhance and inhibit the construction of inclusive processes in FE for this group of learners labelled as dyslexic?
2. In what ways can the college develop and improve inclusive practices to enhance the learning experience of students labelled as dyslexic?
3. What can this study tell us about the inclusive nature of FE generally and how inclusive practice can be promoted across the sector?

The following chapter details how I set about answering these questions.

# **CHAPTER 3: Methodology**

## **Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss and justify my approach to the methodology. I engage in discussion of the issues surrounding my work role and that of a researcher, my ontological position and the nature and limitations of the methodology. I outline what was learned from the pilot study and how this has informed my methodology. The research instruments used are justified and subjected to critical discussion. Analytical procedures are discussed. Issues of validity, reliability, sampling and ethics are examined and I explain how these have been managed.

The research was conducted in 2 parts: a pilot study and the main study. Data was gathered using the following methods:

### **Pilot study**

- Focus group of students labelled as dyslexic
- Semi structured interviews with students
- Questionnaire to classroom assistants
- Field notes

### **Main study**

- Semi structured interviews of additional students
- Semi structured interviews of tutors, managers and classroom assistants
- Documentary analysis of college policies and publications
- Field notes

## **Role of the researcher**

I consider that this is insider research, although, as Hellowell (2006) comments, just being a member of the organisation does not automatically equate with being an insider researcher. I already have much knowledge in the area of FE and dyslexia support and have to acknowledge my vested interest in this area in my role in supporting learners labelled as dyslexic. Prior to this role I was a classroom tutor, team teaching on the vocational programme across college. I have formed various attitudes and views as a result of these roles. I bring my personal values to the research - a commitment to rights, equity and justice in education. I have a relationship with the people involved in my research. These experiences afford me certain advantages – I have an existing rapport with many tutors and I feel I have an insight into various processes and a level of knowledge about the structure of the college and its workings which will hopefully help in teasing out the issues. Nevertheless, this familiarity can have an adverse effect– much can be taken for granted or perceived as ‘normal’ (Houghton and McDonnell, 2006) and I have found it challenging to look critically at my work practices and attitudes as they are so much a part of the ‘everyday’ workings of the organisation. To address this I have developed a set of questions I now ask myself. Why is x done this way? How did this process come about? Why do I think that? This includes my perceptions of others. As Hammersley (1993) points out, an insider, whilst having ideas about the organisation, may also have misconceptions about the workings of others.

## **Theoretical framework for methodology**

Decisions upon which methodological approach to take were based on several factors. Firstly, I considered my research questions - the nature of the problem under investigation is an important consideration (Bird, 1992). What is an inclusive college? What are the students experiencing? Are there common themes? What are the possible explanations for this? Can this information help to improve the provision for these students? This was my

starting point. I required a research method that would allow me to elicit the views of learners, in an effort to understand their experiences. Listening to the learners involves obtaining individual accounts, viewpoints and opinions in order for me to study the understandings, interactions and meanings that are involved in the construction of an inclusive college. This type of research can be said to sit within the qualitative paradigm, with its focus upon natural settings and day-to-day events and situations, and the meanings and understandings that are involved in their construction (Creswell, 2007). Unlike quantitative research methods with their emphasis upon the manipulation and control of variables, testing, measuring and objectifying, it can address the complexity of human behaviour and interactions.

Much has been made of the dichotomous nature of the two paradigms, of the conflict and divisions that exist. Criticisms of the assumptions of cause and effect are directed at positivist, quantitative approaches, whilst positivists claim that much behaviour is stable and subject to causative explanations. Positivists level accusations of bias and subjectivity at qualitative researchers. However, it can be argued that this polarisation of approaches is not particularly fruitful for educational research and the use of one to the exclusion of the other may result in incomplete answers to research questions (Ercikan and Roth, 2006).

Researchers conducting studies involving students and teachers using a combined approach have asserted that the methods informed each other (Bird, 1992, Mac an Gaill, 1991). In terms of considering potential explanations for the barriers students were experiencing, I therefore initially considered that I may gain a more complete picture by ascertaining the views of a large number of staff, which, given the time constraints of the study, would be impractical with purely qualitative methods.

As a researcher's worldview shapes the research (Creswell, 2007), I needed to consider my own stance or beliefs about the world that influence the decisions I make. My worldview is that there is no one 'objective' reality that can be measured. Rather, reality is constructed



by individuals and, therefore, there are multiple meanings and realities. This view can be described as ‘constructivist’ (Creswell, 2007, p21) and is more aligned to the qualitative paradigm, with its focus upon understanding experience. Therefore, I did not consider quantitative methods alone particularly appropriate, with their emphasis on measurement and statistical analysis. Thus, I decided to pilot a strategic combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in the form of what Creswell (1994, p184) describes as the ‘dominant-less dominant design’, - a small aspect of the research concerning itself with quantitative data within an overarching qualitative paradigm. Subsequently, reflections upon issues encountered in the pilot study led me to revise this and adopt a purely qualitative approach for the main study. Details of this are discussed later in the chapter.

A review of the literature in this area also informed my decisions. It is clear from the literature that the learner voice has a crucial role in developing more inclusive processes. Despite this, there is little existing research that focuses upon listening to the voices of learners labelled as dyslexic in a further education context. Thus, I chose to bring the learner voice to the fore as a method of interrogating the construct of the inclusive college. In this way, I am not just researching inclusive processes, I am focusing upon ‘inclusive research’ (Sheehy, 2005). That is, that the methods used to investigate these processes entail not just involving those it aims to benefit, but ensuring that they are actively participating in and contributing to the research (Walmsley, 2001).

Slee (1998) argues that many studies that are conducted in the name of inclusive research actually serve to reinforce the existing oppressive structures of marginalisation and the exclusion of disabled people, and calls for ‘new times research’ (p11), involving redistributing the power relations in research production. Thus, this study aims for an emancipatory approach to research. The researcher is a facilitator in the process of removing barriers and promoting the empowerment of disabled individuals through this change in the social relations of research production (Barnes, 2003).

The aim of this study is to identify and develop ways of removing barriers to learning to facilitate a change in the students' learning experience. My approach to fulfilling this aim therefore necessitates giving them a voice and acting upon it by making recommendations for ways in which the status quo of attitudes, systems and procedures might be changed to further inclusive processes and implement changes that are within my power.

Within the context of my study, I am doing more than merely investigating the experiences of students - I am attempting to put the research agenda into their hands by identifying the issues of concern to them and using these issues to steer the research. I had initially set out with vague questions that related to improving the current systems in college. However, as I listened to the students it became apparent that the focus should be not upon 'what can be done to improve the existing system?' but upon whether the existing system was appropriate in terms of facilitating inclusive processes. Issues raised by students related to wider factors such as politics and power relationships.

This approach is in contrast to traditional approaches to researching learners experiencing difficulties in learning labelled as dyslexic, which focus upon identification and intervention strategies to 'remediate' the difficulties. Thus research in this area, influenced by the social model, has been increasingly involving people experiencing difficulties in learning in the research process (Walmsley, 2001). The emancipatory paradigm is underpinned by the view that disability is a political problem, in contrast to the interpretive paradigm whose assumption is that it is a social problem and the positivist paradigm with its individualised conception of disability (Oliver, 1992).

Emancipatory research, though, is a challenge. As Barnes and Sheldon (2007) recognise, to transfer control is difficult. Zarb (1992) for example, differentiates between emancipatory and participatory research, arguing that unless both the social relations and the material relations of the research process are transformed, then one can only hope to

achieve participatory research. Whilst acknowledging these limitations, I would concur with Barnes and Sheldon's (2007) suggestion that, although the practice of emancipatory research may be an 'impossible dream' (p233), it is a process towards which everyone researching in this area should aim. Thus, if my study is to be 'part of the solution not part of the problem' (ibid, p236), an emancipatory approach to the research is required. I also acknowledge Oliver's (1997) point that one cannot be given a set of criteria to follow to 'do' emancipatory research; rather only when the research is concluded can a judgement be made on whether or not it was emancipatory, in terms of what it achieved.

### **Justification for choice of research methods**

#### **Case study**

There are many research methods available within the qualitative framework. The issues that prompted the research question have emerged from my experiences in one college. I am interested in probing the construct of the inclusive college in this particular organisation, as it is relevant to my work role and may contribute to enhancing the learning experience of the students for whom I have some responsibility. Thus, it would appear that case study research is most appropriate for this study. A case study is the 'Development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single 'case' or of a small number of related 'cases'' (Punch, 2005). Case study methodology is useful when investigating intricate social processes and asking 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin 1994) and '...when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Yin, 1994, p1).

Therefore, this approach may enable me to provide detailed analysis and insight into my particular college situation. An advantage of case study methodology is the potential to map out the complexities of social situations and the tensions and contradictions that exist amongst the myriad viewpoints of the participants (Cohen, et al, 2007).

The unit of analysis in the case study also requires some consideration (Yin, 1994) – decisions regarding the source of information. Yin identifies holistic and embedded designs, the former involving just one unit of analysis, the latter having different levels that can be analysed to confirm evidence across different layers, within the one case study.

Within the framework of inclusive research, I am prioritising the views of the students; nonetheless, it is necessary also to give voice to other stakeholders if I am to come to some conclusions about the construction of the inclusive college. In addition, the literature highlights potential issues between the rhetoric and reality of inclusive processes. To probe this further necessitates an analysis of policies and their enactment. In this respect, then, my case study requires an embedded design, whereby the main unit of analysis is the college as a whole, but within this, smaller, sub-units require analysis. These sub-groups comprise college documentation and the different stakeholders' views – students, tutors, classroom assistants and managers.

A particular criticism of the case study method, however, is the lack of generalisability of its findings (Shaughnessy, et al, 2000). Indeed, some researchers abandon the notion of generalisability completely in qualitative research (Schofield, 1993). Conversely, Yin (1994) contends that it is possible to develop theories from case studies that can be applied widely. Whilst it may not be appropriate to claim that my findings can be replicated in all FE colleges (and indeed, according to Schofield (1993), is a completely impractical aspect of generalisability in this type of research), I am aiming for what Bassey (1999) refers to as 'fuzzy generalisations' (p52) – statements with uncertainty, suggesting what *may* happen. It is hoped that findings from my case study will shed light upon issues pertinent not just to the stakeholders in my organisation, but also to other institutions with similar issues and the FE sector generally, identifying characteristics distinctive to FE that can facilitate or inhibit inclusive processes.

### Pilot study

Once the decision upon choice of methodology was made, consideration was given to the research instruments that would be most appropriate for obtaining information on my research questions. As I wanted to give a voice to the students, listen to their views and understand how situations and meanings are constructed, I required methods of data collection that would offer such detail. The pilot study was designed to enable the experiences of students to shape the overall research and provide me with some initial guidance upon the issues that students felt were important to them. In addition it helped me to trial my chosen methods of data collection. Decisions regarding the quantity of data to collect at this initial pilot stage were influenced by time constraints of both myself and the students, and consideration of the aims of the pilot study – whether the data generated was sufficient to enable me to identify a range of pertinent issues to pursue further in the main research. Thus, a focus group of 7 students was initially arranged. (The section on sampling explains how participants were selected).

### Focus groups

A type of group interview, focus groups are contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme or topic, where the interaction with the group leads to data and outcomes' (Cohen, et al, 2007, p376). The idea of the focus group is that interaction takes place between the participants, rather than participant and researcher, thus enabling participants' perspectives to prevail - data emerges from the interaction between participants (ibid). The researcher role is less as an interviewer, and more one of facilitator or mediator (Punch, 2005), thus providing a method of engaging and foregrounding the student voice. A further strength of this method of data gathering is that this interaction can offer a means of gaining insights into issues and revealing information that may not necessarily be accessed by other methods, such as interviews (Punch, 2005, Cohen, et al, 2007). Other advantages of focus groups are that

they allow for collection of a large amount of data quickly and are more efficient in terms of time than conducting several interviews (Burgess, et al, 2006). I could therefore ascertain the perspectives of several students together to begin the data collection process. There was a loose agenda to discuss their college experiences as a student labelled as dyslexic. To initiate discussion I gave each person a sticky note to jot down their responses to the question: 'What makes you feel included or excluded at college?' Their responses were placed on a flip chart under two headings and each participant was encouraged to explain their comments. An illustration of the responses is provided in Appendix 3. Discussions between the students ensued. Occasionally I would ask questions to prompt more discussion, but as far as possible I allowed the discussion to run, to hear the issues they felt were important. This discussion was transcribed and annotated.

### Thematic analysis

In an effort to make sense of the data, initial themes were identified. Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p73). It is a useful way of being able to organise and describe findings (ibid). Thus, from this initial focus group discussion I learned of many factors that were contributing to these students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion at college.

### Interviews

The difficulty with a focus group is that they are less personal than interviews and issues cannot be discussed in any great detail (Burgess, et al, 2006). I felt I needed to supplement this information with more detailed discussion on various issues. Thus, I also chose to utilise interviews. The information from the focus group was very valuable in terms of helping me to devise questions for interviews with students, informed by themes I had identified from this initial discussion, in addition to themes in the literature. In this way, the students and the issues pertinent to them helped to steer the next stage of the research – student interviews – with the interview agenda framed by concerns of the students

themselves. Cohen et al (2007) state that interviews allow people ‘...to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and express how they regard situations from their point of view’ (p349).

In contrast to other data collection methods such as questionnaires for example, interviews can provide rich data and reveal information that may not be apparent in written responses (Bell, 1999). The interview, then, appeared appropriate to this study. In choosing the type of interview to conduct, various designs are available. Cohen, et al (2007) outline 4 types of interview: structured, unstructured, non-directive and focused. Whilst I had identified from the literature review certain topics relevant to my research questions I wished to explore, alongside issues raised in the focus group, I was keen that the participants discuss issues relevant to them, rather than setting a prescribed agenda. Thus, neither structured (having a pre-set agenda) nor unstructured (completely open agenda) interviews were appropriate. A semi-structured or focused interview structure was chosen. This focused approach is characterised by a loose structure whilst allowing a great deal of freedom for the interviewee to discuss issues and views (Bell, 1999). Appendices 4 - 7 list the questions for the various stakeholders. Questions were asked in an open ended way, such as: ‘Talk to me about your school experiences’. The questions were not rigidly followed, often merely used as prompts, as many participants spoke freely and I would often follow up points they made. The interviews were recorded, and a word for word transcript produced, to avoid a further level of interpretation that could occur if relying upon notes taken, or recall of conversations.

Mindful, as Bell (1999) points out, that interviews are not straightforward to do and that they are open to bias in a variety of ways, steps were taken to minimise this bias and strengthen the validity and reliability of the research. These steps are discussed later in the chapter.

### Questionnaire in pilot study

From a reading of the literature and a consideration of my research questions, I identified issues that required investigation and that I felt may be illuminated by gathering data from the large number of classroom assistants in the case study college. To access this wealth of information solely by the use of interviews would have been impractical within the timescale of the research and the constraints of our work commitments. I was therefore initially attracted to gathering some data through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaire's utility is in enabling large amounts of structured survey data to be obtained without the need for the researcher to participate (Cohen, et al, 2007). It can also be a good method of gathering data quickly and inexpensively (Bell, 1999). However, it did need careful planning – as Bell (1999) cautions, it's more difficult than people think to create a good questionnaire. It was important that, as Robson (2002) highlights, it was written so that participants understood the questions in the way intended and were happy to impart the information required.

Initial questions were designed to elicit factual information regarding age, gender, length of service and programme area of work. I also sought to elicit information on attitudes and beliefs. Thus, information was ascertained regarding how key concepts such as dyslexia and inclusion were defined. Other questions related to behaviours and practices, to ascertain the college response to the provision of support. The final questions in the questionnaire referred to participants' evaluations of the current position of the college with regard to issues of support and inclusivity.

The questionnaire was administered to 6 classroom assistants chosen at random. I received 4 replies. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 8.



### Field notes

Field notes are recordings of ‘naturally occurring interaction’ (Silverman, 2005, p157), and they have a range of functions, including the ability to witness processes taking place and identify practical issues in everyday life (ibid).

I gained much information in my day to day interactions and conversations with people. For example, informal conversations would sometimes ensue on completion of the formal interview. However, there was an issue of how much of this information I could use in my research. Ethically I realised this would have to be part of the agreement with participants. I was aware that it reduces the control they have over what they are prepared to disclose. Ultimately I felt I needed to respect their right to disclose ‘officially’ what they chose. I therefore used field notes only when they illuminated a specific issue not revealed by my other data collection methods and always with the consent of participants. Instead I worked on fostering the trust and rapport necessary for them to feel free to say what they feel in interviews.

### Documentary analysis

Documentation was reviewed in order to provide information on the college’s espoused position on inclusion and compare it with the reality of the lived experiences of students and staff, to ascertain whether there were issues with policy formulation or implementation that affected inclusive processes. Documents were chosen for analysis on the basis of their relevance to the research questions -those that related to inclusive processes: the Equality and Diversity Policy, Learning Support Policy, Disability Statement, prospectuses and publicity material. I chose only policies that were published on the college intranet or website and documents in current use as I ascertained from management that these policies have been accepted as reflecting current college policy. Initial analysis of the documentation took place using Houghton, et al’s (2006) suggested list of questions for use in reviewing policies from an inclusive framework, as shown in Figure 3.1. The theoretical

analysis thus relates to how the documents fit with the construct of the inclusive college.

Appendix 9 provides an example of analysis of documentation.

## **A framework for future analyses and policy development**

Below are a number of general questions, which policy-makers, practitioners and researchers may wish to consider when evaluating and reviewing policy documents:

### **Nature and content of policies**

- Who has produced the documents – disability specialist or service specialist?
- When was the document produced, and how is it positioned in terms of the historical context of disability equality?
- Does the policy identify those with responsibility for implementing and reviewing inclusive disability policy?
- Are the documents themselves easily accessible and how are they *used* by students and staff?
- Do the documents lie primary within 'student support / welfare' or do they view disability issues as integral to information for *all* students / staff?
- Do policies work towards institutional change (e.g. rethinking methods of assessment) or view disability equality as a matter of making adjustments on an individual case-by-case basis?

### **Terminology and discursive positioning**

- Are the terms used complicit with a more individual or social model of disability? (e.g. 'students with disabilities' or 'disabled students')
- Is terminology used consistently and guidelines informing practice regularly updated to reflect the changing usage within the institution and wider higher education sector?
- Is the provision of support / adjustments contingent upon students accepting the identity of being 'disabled'?
- Is responsibility located with students or the institution? i.e. Are students required to be pro-active in seeking support and demanding adjustments?

### **Definitions and clarity**

- Are definitions used clearly and consistently in the documents or is there ambiguity concerning inclusion of different impairments within the category of 'disabled students'?
- Are mental health issues included within a focus on impairments?
- Do the policies incorporate clear advice and guidance to staff and students or is the information contradictory?

**Figure 3.1: Framework for analysis of policy (Houghton, et al, 2006)**

## Sampling

I was interested in eliciting the viewpoints of different groups of stakeholders – students, tutors, classroom assistants and management. The main sampling procedures to be considered were: probability and non-probability (or opportunity) sampling (Burgess, et al, 2006). Probability sampling can involve choosing a random sample, representative sample or surveying a whole population. Practical and technical issues required consideration. I had chosen to use interviews as my main method of gaining information. Thus, in practical terms only a small sample of stakeholders could realistically be interviewed within the timescale of this study, therefore probability or random sampling methods would not be feasible. Further, generalisability, in the positivist sense, is not a main aim of this research. It is more focused upon the experiences of students and staff in the case study college. Therefore, representativeness in sampling was not a major consideration. To this end I employed what Kalton (1983, in Coolican, 2004) describes as purposive sampling. A method of non-probability sampling, this technique involves choosing participants in the organisation with knowledge and experience of the issues under investigation who could offer rich information that can be explored in-depth.

All student participants were selected from those who were labelled as dyslexic and accessed learning support. When I began, I used convenience sampling – choosing participants on the basis of accessibility (Cohen, et al, 2007). Often the students were those with whom I was working and already had a rapport. One student approached me asking to participate in the study when he heard about it from his brother. As the data gathering progressed, it was guided by the process of theoretical sampling. A characteristic of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), additional participants were selected on the basis of their ‘theoretical relevance’ (ibid, p49) in furthering the development of the emerging theory. A manager, a classroom assistant and a tutor were selected on this basis as I thought they had relevant knowledge and experience of the issues. Participants

sometimes suggested others I could approach and I obtained 6 participants by this ‘snowball’ (Cohen et al, 2007) method. The sample size was added to until I judged that the interviews were providing no new themes or insights into the research questions – the point of ‘saturation’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The limitations of this sampling procedure require acknowledgement. It can be claimed that it is deliberately biased and selective (Cohen, et al, 2007). However, I did endeavour to obtain a sample of students and staff, male and female, from a variety of curriculum areas – vocational, A level and adult, so that each curriculum area was represented. Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that my sample could reflect the wider population, and in this respect, caution must be exercised in the degree to which the findings from this study can be generalised.

### **Analytical framework**

In attempting to make sense of the data presented to me, the choice of analytical framework was influenced by a reading of the literature and issues arising from the data. The literature suggests that linked to the emancipatory paradigm is the tradition of critical theory. With a particular focus on adults learning, it ‘...can suggest ways that adult education can contribute to building a society organised according to democratic values of fairness, justice and compassion’ (Brookfield, 2005, p7).

Critical theory allows us to view our practice within a social and political context and should be an impetus for change (ibid). From my theoretical perspective that all learners have a right to equitable learning opportunities and my desire to make recommendations for such changes as might facilitate greater equity in FE for learners, critical theory appears relevant.

Critical theory perceives both the positivist and interpretive paradigms to provide inadequate explanations for behaviour in social situations as they ignore the politics of the

situation (Cohen et al, 2007). Emerging from the literature pertaining to inclusion were issues of the silencing of the student voice, the dominance of particular discourses such as the deficit discourse and the struggle to effect more inclusive processes. These issues link to politics and power, vested interests and dominant values. Whilst a social constructionist perspective acknowledges multiple interpretations of a situation and allows for analysis of interactions and situations, my data warranted a political dimension if I was to gain a fuller understanding of the processes involved in the construction of the inclusive college.

Critical theory appears to offer a way of illuminating how ‘...many of our troubles are produced by systemic constraints and contradictions’ (Brookfield, 2005, p5).

Linked with my research orientation of giving a voice to students and the methodological approach of emancipatory research, critical theory thus appears to fit as an appropriate lens through which to analyse the data.

Critical theory is informed by the work of those in the Frankfurt School - Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse and Horkheimer, and subsequently Habermas (Cohen et al, 2007). Brookfield (2002) outlines Horkheimer’s position on how critical theory differs in 5 significant ways from other theories.

Firstly, it is inherently political as it focuses upon the conflict between social classes operating within the ‘commodity exchange economy’ of capitalism - the production of items is based upon their profitability – an idea originating in the work of Marx. This is an economy which by its very nature creates tensions as the desire of some people for freedom or emancipation is met with the desire of others to prevent it. Linking this to adult learning, Brookfield (2005) argues that the work of learning and teaching thus comes to have an exchange value. For example, learning to read is exchanged for a qualification to facilitate greater success in the employment market, and assumes greater significance than its use value in terms of helping develop increased confidence, for example.

A second characteristic is critical theory's aim to provide people with information and knowledge that will free them from oppression. Unlike other theories, it does not separate itself from political action or intervention, but considers itself 'transformative' in its ability to inspire people to change things.

Thirdly, it does not attempt to separate the researched from the researcher; instead the theory's use depends upon the extent to which people identify with its philosophy of a better life for those impoverished by the workings of a capitalist system.

The fourth point made is that the theory is normative and prescribes an alternative world. Unlike other theories that attempt to explain the world as it is, critical theory has a vision for an alternative, based on notions of democracy and equity and fairness.

Its final defining feature is that it will not be known if the theory is true or not until the world it envisions is created and its compassion assessed. Thus, Brookfield (2005) argues, 'Critical theory must focus upon adult education as a political process in which certain interests and agendas are always pursued at the expense of others; curriculum promotes some content as 'better' than some other and evaluation is the power by some to judge the efforts of others' (Brookfield, 2005, p4). This involves challenging the dominant ideology – revealing the vested interests of the powerful that promote the perpetuation of inequalities (Cohen et al, 2007).

However, the theory may be perceived as somewhat utopian and lacking in practical details on its application to education (Cohen et al, 2007). Furthermore, Brookfield (2005) cautions that it is not some 'grand theory to explain all social interaction for all time' (p4). Rather, one must retain a critical stance towards it and appreciate that it is the result of a particular political and social environment. Despite these criticisms, nonetheless, the theory is important in terms of its politicisation of education and identification of curricula and pedagogy as problematic (Cohen, et al, 2007). In this way, it provides a useful lens

through which to analyse the experiences of the stakeholders in this study, in an effort to provide recommendations for a more just and equitable educational environment for learners.

Cohen, et al (2007) state that a critical theory of education necessitates the interrogation of a number of issues:

- How is the system perpetuating or reducing inequality?
- How are knowledge and the curriculum socially constructed?
- How is power produced and reproduced through education?
- Whose interests are served by education and how legitimate are they?

Thus, analysis of the data takes places within this context of critical theory by considering the above issues.

### **Procedures for selection and analysis of data**

Decisions upon how to make sense of the data collected depend upon the purpose of the analysis (Cohen et al, 2007). There are a variety of methods of data analysis available - the method chosen should be 'fit for purpose' (ibid). I did not want my analysis to merely describe or summarise the situation in my case study college. Rather, to be able to answer my research questions necessitated analysis that could result in theories to account for the tensions and dilemmas involved in the construction of inclusive processes at college. I did not set out with a theory or theories to test; rather I was looking to discover the theory from the data collected. In addition, with large volumes of data, a systematic method of making sense of it all, managing it and interpreting it in a meaningful way was required. To this end, Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach to data analysis appeared a most appropriate means of achieving my research aims. This method involves coding words and phrases, grouping and categorising by concept and category and using 'constant comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) with other data to eventually generate theories

from the data. I therefore chose to utilise grounded theory as means of providing an organised approach to managing and analysing the data, in an effort to develop ideas and theories from close scrutiny of the data.

### How data was selected for analysis

Data was selected for analysis on the basis of its relevance to the research questions, focusing upon the factors that enhance or inhibit the construction of inclusive processes in a further education environment. The overall conceptual framework is that of the construct of the 'inclusive college' – what it means, what it looks like, how it may be achieved. I acknowledge my active role in creating and constructing the social world I am analysing, through the subjective nature of the choices I have made regarding collection, coding and selection of data. I appreciate that another researcher researching the same topic may adopt a different theoretical orientation, make different choices and produce different results.

### Analysis of interviews

Once collected, the data was subjected to several stages of analysis. Each interview was transcribed by me. Although time consuming, the trade-off was that it allowed me to be immersed again in the interview, and preliminary analysis took place as I transcribed. This took the form of annotation in the margin as thoughts and ideas occurred to me. Initially, broad, general categories were identified and colour coded, linked to my research questions and the literature. These categories were: teaching and learning, the label of dyslexia, previous experiences, discourses and views on support. Appendix 11 provides an example of the annotation and coding process.

First-order coding took place initially. This type of coding is closely linked to the data – what Glaser (1978) describes as 'substantive' coding (Dey, 2004). Each 'comment' on a particular part of the transcript I thought was of interest was allocated a code. For an example, the comment '**Teaching style not matching student learning style**' was



allocated a code of **'mismatch of T&L'** and **'Felt happy when identified dyslexic'** allocated a code of **'reaction to label'**. Codes were focused upon interviewees' experiences, understandings, relationships, feelings and ways of thinking and interpreting situations, linked to the research question of studying what is involved in constructing inclusive processes in this context. As Darlington and Scott (2002), state, the research question should shape the kinds of codes used, in addition to the levels of analysis.

This was completed with all subsequent interviews, fitting each comment into a particular code or devising a new code for additional data. The interviews were combed for frequencies, commonalities and differences in the early stages. I did this by organising the data into a table to enable me to see at a glance how common the issue was amongst participants and identify the similarities or differences in experience. Appendix 12 illustrates this process. The process continued and was further refined as the interviews progressed. Some codes were merged if I felt there was overlap or they were too similar. For example, I began with a code of **'segregation'** from the first interview with Sara, using her words. I had other codes such as **'isolation'** and **'exclusion'** in subsequent interviews but eventually combined these into a code of **'exclusion'**.

As the data collection, review of the literature and layered analysis continued, additional themes began to emerge. Progressing from my initial coding of the data, which was mainly descriptions of what was happening in the case study college, to analysis of what was going on beneath the surface and why it was happening, led to the discovery of additional themes. For example, participants commented on what and who was valued and the difference between the rhetoric of the college and the reality of their experiences. A detailed excerpt of this analytical process is attached as Appendix 13. Themes such as power relationships and the politics of educational processes began to gain prominence. This in turn led to my probing these issues in more detail in subsequent interviews – a progressive focusing of themes as they emerged from my analysis of the data (Appendix 4

contains details of additional prompts added to the student interview questions). Finally, tentative theories were formulated and the data again revisited to check the fit between the data and the emergent theory. Common themes to emerge related to:

- Being listened to
- Injustice, inequity and unfairness
- Market discourse in education
- Value of practical versus academic skills
- Rhetoric versus reality

### **Limitations of method**

It cannot be assumed that the use of grounded theory's set of prescribed processes of data analysis provides more 'reliability' in interpretation (Thomas and James, 2006), as reality does not exist independently of individuals (Eisner, 1992). Subjectivity pervades all aspects of research, whether qualitative or quantitative (Peshkin, 1988). Research is not a neutral process. It thus raises issues of validity, reliability and bias in the research. Still, that is not to say that each subjective viewpoint is equally valid and we can never know the truth of situations. As Miles and Huberman (1984) state, '...some conclusions are better than others, and not everything is acceptable' (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p22). Thus, we can make decisions about the relative credibility of information (Philips, 1993). In order to reduce the possibility of false conclusions, I have attempted to put some procedures in place in order to minimise the effects of what Hammersley and Gomm (1997) describe as 'systematic and culpable error' (par 4.13). These procedures are as follows:

1. Use of semi-structured or focused interviews. Choices of phrases used and the way conversation is initiated and sustained by the interviewer can be subjective and thus affect validity and reliability (Lewis, 2005). Thus, questions for interviews were quite open ended and I tried not to use leading questions.

2. Triangulation of data. Checking for agreement across the different layers - for example, the various stakeholders and documentation.
3. Transparency of reporting of my beliefs and values. Constant reflexive analysis and an attempt at what Hammersley (1993) describes as ‘a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement’ (p219). Although I am a part of, and absorbed in, the culture of the college and patterns of working and beliefs, I am also attempting to stand outside of this, questioning taken-for granted assumptions and critically analysing my conceptions and perceptions.

Yet, as Peshkin (1988) argues, it is not enough to merely acknowledge the inherent subjectivity in the research. It has to be addressed through the researcher being consciously aware of and identifying their subjectivity. My role in college influences what people say to me and I bring my own values and beliefs to the research – values of fairness and justice and equity of educational opportunity for all and my belief that the college may not be doing all that it can to respond appropriately to its diversity of learners. Identification of this subjectivity, whilst not eliminating it, can help to manage it, avoiding the danger that ‘...the researcher’s analysis may say as much about the researcher as about the text being analysed...’ (Cohen, et al, 2007, p495).

### **What was learned from the pilot study**

The pilot study afforded an opportunity to test out my initial research questions, which were:

1. What are the factors that enhance and inhibit the construction of inclusive processes in FE for this group of learners labelled as dyslexic?
2. In what ways can the college develop and improve inclusive practices to enhance the learning experience of students labelled as dyslexic?
3. What can this study tell us about the inclusive nature of FE generally and how inclusive practice can be promoted across the sector?

From the experience of conducting the initial study, including the literature review and results of the pilot research, I felt that these questions remained relevant, although there are limitations to question three in terms of the extent to which this study enables me to make generalisations across the sector. As this is a case study of one particular institution with its own history, characteristics, geographical location and staff and student profile, there are limits to the generalisation of findings. Nonetheless, it is hoped that there are some commonalities, themes and situations with which many institutions will be able to identify. In this way, the study can contribute to the knowledge in this area and provide other educational establishments with information upon which to develop their own inclusive processes.

The pilot study also allowed me to try out the research instruments of interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. As a result of this, the questions for the interviews were amended to reflect the shifting focus upon marketisation and the rhetoric/reality gap. (Appendix 4 details these amendments). The questionnaire (attached as Appendix 8) highlighted some interesting issues with classroom assistants which was followed up with interviews, but I decided not to continue to collect questionnaire data, preferring the rich, detailed data that interviews afforded, in addition to the ability to probe relevant answers in more depth and check my understanding. I felt that the questionnaires were limited in the information I could glean to help me answer my research questions. Analysis of the responses proved problematic, often raising more questions than answers. Appendix 14 provides a summary of my analysis of the questionnaire responses. Finally, the initial case study methodology warranted some revision for the thesis as it was apparent from the pilot research that it was necessary to probe different layers of the institution. Students highlighted concerns with tutors, thus I felt that going beyond the voice of the learner and also listening to tutors was appropriate. I believed it could be fruitful in terms of potentially providing insights into the tensions between tutors and learners. Similarly, I felt it

important to listen to the voices of other stakeholders and obtain evidence from documentation such as policies and prospectuses, in an effort to interrogate the construct of the inclusive college. Thus an embedded case study design was adopted for the main study, which meant conducting interviews with tutors, managers and classroom assistants, in addition to analysing college documentation.

### **Ethical issues**

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004) considers that the researcher has the following responsibilities: to obtain voluntary informed consent, to avoid deceiving participants, to inform them of their right to withdraw and to ensure their right to confidentiality and anonymity. To this end, the nature of my research was verbally explained to the participants and a written copy issued. This is attached as Appendix 15. They were also informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Names were changed to protect anonymity and the college has not been named. However, this may not guarantee anonymity - absolute anonymity is very difficult (Smythe and Murray, 2000) as certain people may be identified from their role. Anonymity was not a particular issue for students but it was of concern to some tutors and managers, particularly if they felt they had said something that could be perceived as contentious or negative about the college.

Participants were informed that they could review the transcripts and they may request changes to further protect their identity. One participant, a manager, took up the offer and confirmed that she was not only completely satisfied with her and others' anonymity, she was in full agreement with my overall data interpretation.

The recordings were kept on a device to which only I had access and they were deleted once transcribed. I obtained written consent to conduct the research from an assistant principal and the college principal was informed verbally of my research and the topic.

Nevertheless, whilst following these guidelines is a crucial responsibility of a researcher, the guidelines are merely what Cohen et al (2007) describe as ‘procedural ethics’ (p51). A set of guidelines is not sufficient, they argue. In addition to this, one has to consider the rights and wrongs of the particular research situation. Ethics are embedded in the whole process, from choosing the topic to communicating the results and one must have an individual code to make decisions on acceptable ethical behaviour within one’s own specific research situation (ibid). I am aware of the sensitivity that is required throughout the whole process to be alert to and manage the ethical issues. Overall I have strived for honesty and integrity.

### Issues that emerged

I had a responsibility to the participants to ensure that the research does not ‘harm’ them. In one interview, a participant became quite angry and emotional at relating his past experiences. I intervened and reiterated his right to stop and withdraw from the interview and the research if he wished, but he requested that that interview continue.

A further issue is illustrated by an incident that occurred in my interview with Ryan. (He gave his permission for me to use all the quotes that follow). We had concluded the interview and I had switched off the voice recorder. As he got up to go, he commented about learning support:

*‘It’s made out to be such an important part of college, then  
you’re shipped off to the back end of the library.’*

**(Ryan, Level 2 vocational student) (Field notes)**

When asked if he would repeat his comments on record, his response was more controlled and had a slightly different emphasis.

*‘Because learning support is such an important part of*

*college I can't understand why you're squished to like the  
other end of the library...'*

These different responses raise several issues. I considered that I may have problems with my interview technique and I needed to find a way of getting beyond the rhetoric to avoid answers the participants may think I want. Discussing my reflections on this with him, he stated that being recorded made him more cautious about what he said:

*'...you're more diplomatic when it's on tape, but when  
it's off tape you just say what you want.'*

**(Ryan, Level 2 vocational student) (Field notes)**

The researcher effect was very apparent. There are issues of trust. I maybe did not reassure him enough about confidentiality. I entered the research situation assuming that, as I had an existing good rapport with the student, trust was established. However, as Measor and Woods (1984) state, the building of trust is a slow process in research and I was made aware of assumptions I made regarding my relationship with participants. I also needed to consider how safe participants feel about what they say – if Ryan said negative things about his experiences at college, did he think it would have repercussions like it did at school? He may have had a fear of the support being withdrawn if he was not entirely complimentary about it. His school experiences have in many ways reinforced the power relations that exist between pupil and teacher. This experience highlighted to me how vital it was to provide the assurances that participation in the research will not lead to any harm coming to the participants. To this end I found myself offering to Ryan the opportunity of collaboration. Whilst I had initially considered the option of utilising respondent validation, I had not considered one of its advantages as perhaps breaking down some of the power relations between tutor and student. He was very happy to be involved and I

found it very useful. Discussing my analysis enabled me to clarify, for example, Ryan's use of the word '*lively*'. Was this good or bad? He confirmed that

*'...the maths class is bad lively. It's a case of, "I wish everybody would just shut up then I can get on with the test and get out of here"'.*

**(Ryan, Level 2 vocational student) (Field notes)**

I discovered, though, that this process was very time consuming and it was therefore not pursued. The only other validation I received was, as mentioned, from a manager's reading of my data interpretation.

The 'off the record' comments in Ryan's example proved very illuminating. I also gained much information in my day to day interactions and conversations with people. However, there was an issue of how much of this information I could use in my research. Ethically I realised this would have to be part of the agreement with participants. I was aware that it reduces the control they have over what they are prepared to disclose. In the end I felt I needed to respect their right to disclose 'officially' what they chose. I therefore used field notes minimally and always with the consent of participants. Instead I worked on fostering the trust and rapport necessary for them to feel free to say what they feel in interviews.

Finally, this example also highlighted the potentially inhibiting effect that the method of recording an interview can have upon the data. I became even more aware of this in tutor and management interviews, when I would sometimes observe their gaze falling upon the recording device as they made particular comments. For example, I asked a manager to comment on a particular aspect of the management structure. Looking directly at the recorder, she said after a little thought, '*I don't think I can answer that*'. She clearly had things she wanted to say, but it appeared that it conflicted with her managerial role and the



expectation that issues are not voiced. Visibility of the recorder reminded her to be cautious at times, although as the interview progressed she did become more forthright.

There are advantages and disadvantages to any method of collecting data and it involves trade-offs between the negative effects and the potential gains in utilising a particular method. For me, a verbatim transcript of the interview was important in terms of accuracy of reporting and reducing the potential for misinterpretation. I therefore chose to work on fostering trust and reassuring on the issue of anonymity, to promote candour.

### **Surprises in the data**

I set out on this research journey with the aim of discovering ways of improving the college provision for students. Whilst aware that all was not well, I assumed the solutions would lie in improving existing services and provision. But the students' message was one of wider implications and I was in danger of focusing upon the wrong question. The issue, I learned, was not one of how existing services could be improved, but whether existing support services were an appropriate response to meeting their diversity of requirements. Thus, wider issues than I had first anticipated began to emerge from the data.

### **Concluding comments**

This chapter has outlined the research methodology and issues surrounding the methods chosen in this study. The research is situated within the qualitative tradition as it is concerned with participants' experiences of inclusive processes. Research methods were chosen that enabled the gathering of rich, detailed data and the data subjected to the structured analytical technique of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), to enable theory to emerge from the data. Steps were taken to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research and ethical issues managed. I was concerned to foreground student voices to enable them to steer the research, striving for a more emancipatory approach (Oliver 1992). Data analysis was undertaken through the lens of critical theory (Brookfield, 2005),

in order to illuminate the wider structural, social and political contexts within which the processes of inclusion and exclusion operate.

The next chapters – Chapters 4 to 5 - detail the findings from this study in relation to research question number 1: What are the factors that enhance and inhibit the construction of inclusive processes in FE for this group of learners labelled as dyslexic?

The data derives from a focus group of 6 students, interviews with 21 stakeholders (including 10 students) and analysis of college policies and publicity material. The chapters focus upon student perspectives, but also give voice to other stakeholders – tutors, classroom assistants and management. Chapter 4 focuses upon teaching and learning practices and Chapter 5 is concerned with issues of support.

## **CHAPTER 4: Teaching and learning practices**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a critical analysis of classroom pedagogy. A variety of factors relating to teaching and learning practices were identified by students in the focus group as contributing to their experiences of inclusion and exclusion.. These factors were discussed in more detail in subsequent interviews. Whilst foregrounding the student voice, I also draw upon data from tutors, classroom assistants and management, examining their differing perspectives. Analysis reveals dominant belief systems and wider policy and power influences upon teaching and learning practices that contribute to students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

### **Learning styles and pedagogy**

The focus group highlighted that tutor awareness of learning styles was a factor that contributed to their inclusion. Students felt it was important that information was delivered in a variety of ways, rather than, for example, merely relying upon dictation. They stated that it helped when the tutor read what was written on the whiteboard, that they were given a choice of assessment methods, that the pace of lessons was steady and that notes were available online. Awareness of learning styles, they felt, was a means of getting to know them as individuals and responding to their personal preferences. This, they argued, facilitated their inclusion in the classroom. Yet, five out of the six students in the focus group stated that the pedagogical practices in their classes did not match their learning style, which created barriers to their learning. This was also supported by evidence from students in interviews. (Extracts from the transcriptions of the focus group and student interviews are attached as Appendix 10). Interestingly, students tended to conceptualise learning styles not in terms of the theories discussed in Chapter 2 such as sensory learning styles (VAK) or Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, but in terms of their personal

preferences for learning. The variety of ways of learning included having reminder notes as spider diagrams in a file (Sara), reading just the most important sections of text to cope with the volume (Carolyn), having spellings written on the board (Debra) and having work checked to ensure that it is correct (Phoebe).

Every student interviewed cited instances of clashes between the delivery of information and how they learned. Typical responses were:

*'Someone can't just explain it a different way and getting used to teaching styles takes about 6 months!'* **(Naomi, A level student)**

*'... at the start of this year we had parents' evening and he said to my mum that he doesn't think that I work well to his teaching style, and at that point I'm thinking well, look, you knew this...would it not have been best to say, 'look, do you want to move classes?' or something'* **(Leah, A level student)**

*'...it seems to be that teachers get sort of stuck in one learning style...'*  
**(Carolyn, A level student)**

In these examples, the focus is not upon how the tutor can adapt to meet the needs of the student, as reflected in the social model. Rather, both Naomi and Leah perceive that they need to find ways to adapt themselves to the teaching. Naomi tries to adapt to the teaching styles. For Leah, the solution was to think about finding a different teacher. Whilst the students may find the mode of delivery frustrating, the implicit message is one of student fitting to the college – student deficit and individual solution and an acceptance that this is the case. Tutors do not appear to be valuing the diversity of learning styles, instead expecting the student to fit with the teacher's delivery style, creating a barrier to access to information for students. These students ostensibly have the protection of legislation such

as the Equality Act (2010) which is underpinned by the philosophy of rights and entitlements, but there appears to be a problem with the college response, indicating difficulties with the implementation of legislation. Phoebe's account of an incident in class provides further evidence of this (the full account is detailed in Appendix 16). She recalls the exchange she had with the tutor:

*'... I said, 'It's your teaching – you're teaching too fast, I can't keep up with you', and she said, 'I can't keep the rest of the class behind just because you don't get it. I can't say to them, 'Phoebe doesn't get it, so let's go over it again'. So that got my back up, and I think because I was that way out anyway, I was really rude, and I said to her, 'Well neither can you go on with the rest of the class and leave me behind, just because I don't get it. You need to teach me'. Then that was it, and she said, 'Well maybe we should get you some support in class and that was how she left it.'* **(Phoebe, adult student)**

Again, the student is perceived to be the problem, resulting in barriers to learning for Phoebe and her exclusion from the classroom teaching and learning. Phoebe's response to the clash of teaching and learning style is in contrast to the acquiescence of Naomi and Leah. She openly challenged the tutor and the assertion that her priority was to teach the majority, by pointing out that she too needed to be taught. Phoebe desperately wanted to be included in the class and asserted her basic right to be taught.

Phoebe's experience stands in stark contrast to the message in the college Equality and Diversity Policy (attached as Appendix 17) which states: *'We believe that equality for all is a basic human right'* and *'We value and celebrate the diversity in our society and are striving to promote and reflect that diversity within this College'*. The rhetoric of college policy is not being implemented here. Tensions are very apparent between the policy

rhetoric and the differing understandings of the two people involved in this interaction, regarding expected responses to Phoebe's experience of difficulties. Phoebe expresses a sense of anger and injustice at being left behind 'just because' she is not as quick as others at grasping the concepts. She finds herself in a situation where her different speed of working becomes a difficulty and her 'diversity cannot be valued' (Benjamin et al, 2003, p552) as it is in conflict with other situational pressures. The teacher has a set curriculum to deliver within a prescribed time; thus, Phoebe's 'difference', setting her apart from the 'norm' is transformed into a 'disability' (ibid). The solution offered is not a change to classroom practice to accommodate her, but a call on learning support services to provide a classroom assistant to help Phoebe. Phoebe's experience illustrates the tensions between rights in legislation and the realisation of those rights in practice. The classroom experiences of students labelled as dyslexic appear to be linked to assumptions and perceptions of the learner as deficient, rather than a perception of deficiencies in teaching styles.

For the tutor, the matter was finished. The tutor had the last word, illustrating that when discourses clash in these situations, it is invariably the needs discourse of the professional that wins out in the end (Allan, 2005). The student's rights in law to equitable learning opportunities were clearly not being implemented, which goes against the construct of the inclusive college.

The power relationships in this exchange are very apparent and impacting upon inclusive processes. Phoebe, despite attempting to explain her requirements, is not being listened to, and the opportunity for Phoebe's inclusion on an equitable footing with the other students is denied her by the more powerful tutor. Whose interests are being pursued here? Phoebe desperately wanted the tutor to teach her but the problem was constructed by the tutor as an 'individual deficit' for which Phoebe required support. Phoebe's interests are not being served.

Leah, too, finds that her plea for a slower pace of lesson is ignored.

*'...the fact that I've asked my chemistry teacher more times than I can count, 'please slow down, please could you just write what you are dictating on the board, please could you just stop dictating at 100 miles an hour', it shows that he doesn't listen...' (Leah, A level student)*

Similarly, Nigel and Carolyn express frustration at not being heard.

*'...And they didn't listen. That's the most annoying thing. They don't listen. And when someone's not listening, it's more aggravating than them not helping you. And they wouldn't listen. They just didn't seem to give you a chance. And that's what really annoyed me.'* (Nigel, vocational student).

*'I could have told them from day one that I didn't need the English workshops and that I wasn't going to get the...They don't really listen to you enough!'* (Carolyn, A level student).

Students may often appear accepting of the dominant assumptions of the tutor but even when classroom practice is challenged, students find their voices silenced.

To understand why the rhetoric of the Equality and Diversity Policy is not necessarily reflected in practice necessitates an examination of prevalent discourses. As Corbett (1996) asserts, language plays a very powerful role in how we construct and explain our world. Consideration thus needs to be given to the way in which language is utilised in the case study college and the meaning that is constructed by the discourse.

## Discourses

### Policy discourses

The college Disability Statement is a key policy, as it outlines to prospective and existing students the college's provision regarding additional help and facilities (attached as Appendix 18). In addition, the college Learning Support Policy (attached as Appendix 19) refers the reader to the Disability Statement for more detailed information on college policy. The Disability Statement was written in 1995 in response to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and remains largely unaltered since it was first written. The document states that the college '*...aims to meet the educational needs of the whole community. If you have a disability or learning difficulty you are therefore welcomed...*'

The language of 'have' immediately highlights difference rather than diversity, reinforcing a deficit discourse that assumes the responsibility or 'blame' lies with the learner and effectively absolving the college or its staff of responsibility. In addition, the idea that these students need to be welcomed, unlike all other students for whom it is taken for granted, it could be argued is not inclusive (Allan, 2003), reinforcing their difference.

The document also states: '*The support provided ... will depend on a detailed assessment of your needs...students with disabilities or learning difficulties ...will be given support to achieve their learning potential.*'

The implicit message is one of meeting the 'special needs' of a minority of students, an approach embedded in the traditional view of individual need. Thus, alongside the rights based discourse of the Equality and Diversity Policy is the deficit discourse of the Disability Statement, informed by a particular model of impairment that attributes blame to the learner and clearly has an influence on attitudes and practice. This specialist discourse permeates my college practices and it is in this environment that I am attempting to assert and promote inclusion as a right and entitlement. Thus, there is continuing tension between



my philosophy that separate provision is not equal provision and the system of bolt-on support in operation that is based on a deficit conceptualisation of the learner. I return to these issues in Chapter 7 when discussing my reflections.

### Stakeholder discourses

Deficit discourses permeated student accounts, from the strong language of Leah, for example, describing *'going off for my retard lesson'* to others using phrases such as *'her friend suffered with dyslexia'* (Phoebe) and *'I thought, oh God, I really am stupid'* (Ryan). Similarly, staff data contained references to *'diagnosis'*, *'severe dyslexia'* and *'specialist teaching'*. Evident too, sometimes, was a charity discourse - *'I feel sorry for them'*; *'they need certain dispensations'* – (Maddie, tutor). When the dominant ideology is that of individuals needing 'support' or 'treatment', they have little power to change things (Drake, 1999). The lack of voice of students denies them the opportunity to discuss their individual preferences and support requirements. They have little control over what happens to them in the classroom, as illustrated with Phoebe. Arguably, therefore, this dominant discourse of student deficit militates against students' experiences of inclusion and the construct of the inclusive college. Aligned to Gramsci's (Brookfield, 1995) concept of hegemony, dominant discourses influence how students experiencing difficulties in learning are constructed and thus construct themselves.

In addition to the dominance of a deficit discourse, analysis of tutor responses suggests other factors impacting upon classroom practice.

### **College culture**

Yvonne and Tony explain why they find it difficult to respond to student diversity.

*'The course leader said that I have to create this elite group that I must teach to, I must use all of her resources and it must be this lecturing style where it's not active learning at all...it's difficult for me to come in*

*because I've learned all about different approaches to teaching and different ways of learning that I was keen to try out ... but I'm not allowed.'*

**Q: What do you think is the reasoning behind that?**

*'Because they get really good grades.'* (Yvonne, tutor)

*'How do you deliver a level 4 course without having time to have read contemporary research and issues? How do you deliver on that? You know, there's massive tensions to do with time restraints for that, never mind the inclusive issues that will come on top of those resources. How may you deliver those inclusively, never mind that they need to be contemporary and up to date as well. So there's massive, massive frustrations there.*

*'...to be preparatory before you get into the classroom and to sit back, 'Right, learner A, their needs are this, these resources may...' you know, that just doesn't happen. And I suppose that's not the real world, really, but it would be a nice world.'* (Tony, tutor)

Yvonne appears compelled to deliver her lessons in a particular way that the department perceives is successful in achieving good grades, which is in opposition to the way she wants to deliver her lessons in terms of responding to students' diversity of learning styles.

Tony highlights the tensions between the desire to be more inclusive and the pressures of the job. He views the construction of inclusive processes as an investment in time, and time he feels, is already a huge constraint on his ability to teach effectively.

These accounts suggest that classroom practices are mediated by a culture of 'high grades'. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is pressure and scrutiny upon tutors for successful results

for students, with outcomes for the college linked to funding. The operational system is geared towards the achievement of good grades whatever the cost. The tutors' comments above illustrate that this militates against inclusive processes and the students' desire for effective teaching and learning. Evident too, in these accounts, are the personal conflicts being experienced by some tutors. Tony is experiencing '*massive, massive frustrations*'.

Yvonne comments:

*'I worry so much about how I'm going to fill 90 minutes with just talking and not doing any activities. I worry about it a lot and it does bother me.'*

**(Yvonne, tutor)**

A manager expressed similar sentiments:

*'I had a struggle with my conscience. I didn't feel the students should be pushed to get the highest grades, but that they should get what they deserve, because they will fall apart once they leave us and progress to university. But I had to decide whether to accept the situation or leave.'*

**(Charlotte, manager)**

These comments suggest that there may be a genuine commitment by some staff to the principles of inclusion, but the pragmatics prove difficult as their professional values are in conflict with the expectations for high grades. Inclusive processes are thus perceived as idealistic rather than achievable in practice. Their views highlight the complexities of the processes involved – there is evident discord between the culture of performativity and tutor concerns, their classroom pedagogy and student interests. The ideology of this managerialism, according to Booth (2003), serves to discourage staff from making links between their personal values and what they do, thus acting as an exclusionary force, maintaining existing relations of power as they defer to the those further up the hierarchy.

Thus, a professional concern for student welfare is overridden by the power of the bureaucratic system, in the pursuit of high grades.

### Culture of care?

This argument is further supported by comments from students regarding issues of care.

*'They don't really care if you're going to do well or not. I mean if you get a bad grade they'll put you in AST and make you come in on your study day and that kind of thing, but it seems almost like it's for their class figures. In fact, one teacher last year constantly did that, constantly referred to their class... their, you know - 'I need to get so many 'A's and 'B's and at the moment you aren't meeting those targets as a class. ... and it's just... yeah, it didn't make you feel wanted at all.'* (**Leah, A level student**)

*'They make a big thing about the gifted and talented... But there is a big thing about 'Every person matters', I think it's a slogan for something, is it?'*

**Yes, 'Every individual matters'**

*'That's it, yes. You sometimes see it, but not enough to actually use it as a slogan... It needs to impact to use it. You need to actually put it into practice to project the image.... 'It (the college) could show it cares more.'* (**Naomi, A level student**)

*'I don't know, they don't seem really to care...'* (**Nigel, Level 3 vocational student**)

Contrast this with the college promotional literature: The principal's introduction in the college prospectuses states: *'Our simple ambition is that you are happy and fulfilled ...during your time with us.'*

*'... We aim to provide: personal tutors and teachers who really care for you'*

*'...a college community where each person is valued and can flourish.'*

The rhetoric is one of a caring, inclusive college culture. Yet, students in this study do not particularly feel valued or that tutors care. It could be questioned whether this rhetoric just applies to a particular type of student, the one who is perceived to be a 'high achiever'.

One tutor is very clear about what she perceives to be the college ambition:

*'It's all about getting high grades. From being here the short time that I have, the primary focus and primary goal is to get high grades, isn't it, to beat all the other colleges in the country...' (Yvonne, tutor)*

The focus is not just upon the achievement of a qualification, but upon the achievement of high grades. Whilst this goal may not be formalised in a written document, a policy can be an informal set of guidelines. The achievement of high grades is clearly recognised by this tutor as a key policy of the college. The difficulty is that tensions are evident between this policy, the learner and inclusive practice. The experiences of the students in this study illustrate the gap between policy intention and its realisation in practice. Students are receiving the message that tutor priorities are the achievement of high grades. The consequence is that students feel a lack of care from the college and tutors.

Ball (1994) posits that the market culture of competition in education and comparative data on exam results, influences decisions taken in the classroom by teachers regarding the amount of time and attention to devote and to whom it is devoted. In other words, classroom pedagogy is mediated by external policies. The experiences of students and tutors in this study would appear to support this view.

Time was considered to be an issue for many students in terms of classroom pedagogy.

*'... with the nature of my course it's very busy you see, so if you are struggling with something, because we move at such a fast pace I personally wouldn't feel like stopping the whole class just for my little question, whereas with the in class support you can just say, 'Oh, do you mind just..' Then you don't have to involve everybody else and then it's less embarrassing then as well.'* **(Ryan, Level 2 vocational student)**

The suggestion is that the fast pace of the lesson prevents Ryan from experiencing full inclusion in the lesson, as he finds it less of an issue to ask the classroom assistant for help rather than the tutor.

For Phoebe, too, time was a concern. Her learning experience appears to be compromised by the short length of course.

*'...she has only got 14 weeks to teach me maths...'* **(Phoebe, adult student)**

Three times in her interview she mentioned this issue of time, suggesting that the length of course was not facilitating her learning, but rather emphasising her difference.

Whilst the college policy of striving for high grades may not intentionally set out to run counter to inclusive processes, policy can have unintended consequences (Trowler, 2003). Attempting to implement this policy generates tensions with staff and learners across courses.

*'I think a lot of it is the exam boards trying to fit too much into the syllabus which makes teachers scream, like 'Oh my God we can't do*

*anything about this! We've not got time to teach you slowly or let you go at your own pace because we've got to get through it or you're not going to get your marks!''* (Naomi, A level student)

Naomi's experience is in direct contrast to the construct of the inclusive college as detailed in the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) which states that '...all students need an individual learning environment which matches their requirements' (FEFC, 1996, p33).

What content is delivered and how it is delivered is constrained by time and lesson plans (Ritzer, 2008) in order to get as many students as possible through the system in the common pursuit of achievement as defined by high grades. Education today is thus characterised by structure and control (Ritzer, 2008). Tutors readily acknowledged these issues of time raised by the students. Tony, as documented earlier in the chapter, commented on the '*massive tensions to do with time restraints*'. Much of the pressure related to marking.

*'It's a massive pressure where some students can resubmit and resubmit five, six, seven times for one assignment. You times that by how many assignments you have a year and it's just a phenomenal, impractical amount of marking.'* (Tony, tutor)

*'You're constantly giving work back, giving it back, to be reworked to get the highest grades and you've no excuses. You can't say: 'But there was a reason why this student only got a pass or a merit' or why we didn't get distinction star across the board.'* (Linda, manager)

The time pressure from both a tutor and management perspective related to the workload involved in attempting to achieve high grades. A further consequence of this is that many students feel a sense of detachment from the learning process.

*'... as a system that you're in, you feel that you're a battery-farmed chicken.'* **(Carolyn, student)**

*'Yeah, you weren't acknowledged. You were a number, not a person...'*  
**(Nigel, Level 3 vocational student)**

*'I feel like we're there to be processed.'* **(Leah, A level student)**

This is what Ritzer, (2008) refers to as the McDonaldisation of education, again a result of education policy which imposes market forces on institutions, making them focus upon efficiencies and control (ibid). He describes it as 'education for docility' (p126) where students are expected to conform, and creativity and independent learning are discouraged (ibid), a view echoed by some tutors in my study.

*'I just think that we're just not educating people. You're looking at Bloom's Taxonomy of learning where people, you know, higher order and lower order thinking, about being able to evaluate and analyse...  
...Those skills are not taught. They're not taught, they're tick boxed, they're spoon fed and we are not developing thinking people.'* **(Tony, tutor)**

Classroom pedagogy is not encouraging independent thinking and working. This has implications for the perceived value of qualifications by employers and a student's work competence in the employment market, suggesting that a key role of FE – that of



preparation for work - is being undermined. The general sense is that the college emphasises the achievement of high grades rather than the education of the whole person.

Worrying too, were suggestions that this pressure for high grades led some staff to complete work for students.

*'I don't know how they've actually managed to pass their portfolios to be perfectly honest... Is somebody doing the work for them rather than explaining to them how to do it?'* (**Anna, tutor**)

*'I'm sure the classroom assistant just ends up doing the work so many times!'* (**Pat, tutor**)

*'I think it happens every day, all over the place and I think it's just again about target driven culture.'* (**Tony, tutor**)

Even if work wasn't actually being physically completed for students, there was a general sense that too much was done for them.

*'Yes, I think we spoon feed the students to get the grades and do well and it all looks very good, but I did have a problem with it.'* (**Charlotte, manager**)

*'Students who are at the higher ability end probably grasp it and they're fine, but I seriously wonder about the achievements of some of the students - whether it's their achievement or whether they're just doing it by rote rather than the understanding.'* (**Norma, classroom assistant**)

This resonates with student experiences regarding the 'technicist' imparting of knowledge and pleas for effective teaching, as illustrated in the comments below:

*'...she can't leave me on my own just because I'm a challenge to her. She's got to find a way to make me understand...'* (**Phoebe, adult student**)

*'If I stop and forget what I'm doing or if I lose concentration, they'll be like, 'Get on with your work', and I'll be like, 'Yeah, but I don't know what this means' or this that or the other, 'tell me what it means'.* (**Leon, vocational student**)

*'...and I've asked him several times, 'Could you slow down, could you stop' but he just carries on dictating...and I do tend to feel like, you come to your class, you spend an hour and a half there and you go. You do the work they set you and if you don't, they punish you. So it is more of they're telling you what to do as opposed to maybe 'go away, read this, learn this...'* (**Leah, A level student**)

Again, tutors' practices in the classroom are mediated by the wider policy of achievement of high grades to compete as a college at national level and be perceived as a successful institution. The conflict with professional values is again very apparent. Nevertheless, the policy of high grades achieves a high level of compliance in the organisation, to the detriment of the students' experiences of inclusion in the classroom. Some staff, including managers, appeared unaware that students had these concerns.

*'That's a shock – that students just feel they are being processed'*  
(**Linda, manager**)

*'That surprises me...'* (**Pat, tutor**)

Nonetheless, it was defended by management:

*'There is a hell of a lot of care but because of the pressures it's not perceived so by the students...*

*'...This screams out to me the pressures that the tutors are under. It's the workload. There's no time to see students individually.'* (**Linda, manager**)

The students' experiences were contextualised within the performativity culture of the college – the pressure for high grades, which appears to act in opposition to inclusive processes.

The question arises as to whose interests are served by striving for high grades. High grades form part of the target orientated nature of colleges, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, emerged from the development of a market culture in education. An analysis of the influence of targets not just upon how information was delivered, but to whom it was delivered, also revealed some very interesting findings.

### **Teaching and targets**

A recurring theme that emerged initially from the analysis of student interview data, and was subsequently supported by data from other stakeholders, was the enormous influence of the achievement of targets on students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This came as a surprise to me as I had not initially anticipated the significance of wider political issues upon students' everyday interactions. Typical comments were:

*'You know, with my dyslexia, I was just, you know, brushed to the side, with all the ones who weren't doing so well, and you know, like school, they only concentrated on the ones who were going to leave with the best marks because it looks good in the brochure for the people who are coming the year after.'* (**Nigel, Level 3 vocational student**)

*'If you're not going to get your 3 'A's then the teachers, they don't spend as much time with you. It's almost like if you've not got your target grades of 3 'A's you're not worth helping and I've often felt like that...'*

**(Leah, A level student)**

These students feel that their worth is measured against whether they are considered to be a 'high achiever' and tutors' time allocated to them on this basis. These accounts do not accord with the college rhetoric of equality and valuing diversity. The students clearly do not feel that everyone is treated equally, leading to feelings of not being valued and a strong sense of the injustice of the current content and delivery of the curriculum.

These student views were supported by a comment from a classroom assistant.

*'I think it's pitched to the highest achievers in A level, myself...'*

**(Theresa, classroom assistant)**

A tutor voiced similar sentiments:

*'... they're all being taught to as if they're all capable of getting an A or B. She's said that to me before (my manager) – you just have to disregard those who are not an A or a B grade student...We have to just teach the A grade stuff the whole time...' ...but some students are not A grade students...' (Yvonne, tutor)*

There is a strong sense of teaching to the top performers to gain good results. The consequences of this are highly exclusionary practices, as Yvonne explained:

*'...I know there's a big cull in August and all the students she wants to get through to A2 are allowed to get through, because I hear them talk –*

*'Who shall we get rid of, who do we not want?' So it's only the cream that gets onto A2...' (Yvonne, tutor)*

Tutors here are exercising their exclusionary power through a process of decision making. The students have little input into whether they will continue with a subject into their second year. Again, their voices are not heard and they have little control. Progression on to year 2 in a subject is dependent not upon the student's wishes, but upon the tutor's decision. This in turn is influenced by the need for the tutor to achieve high grades.

These streaming and exclusion processes illustrate the built-in selectiveness of a market driven system that encourages 'academic polarisation'. As Trowler, (2003) asserts, these processes serve to promote those already advantaged against the interests of the already disadvantaged. There are immense difficulties in maintaining the drive for high grades alongside the rhetoric of an inclusive college culture. These tensions are encapsulated in this comment from a tutor:

*'It's such a target driven environment that I think promotes itself as 'inclusive' and 'learner focused' when the targets themselves actually will dictate and are contrary to those two issues...' (Tony, tutor)*

There is inevitable tension between the market culture and inclusive processes, with the focus on outputs working against the construct of the inclusive college.

*'...and priorities – on staff development days what are the priorities that need to be communicated? Again, are the organisational practicalities that allow them at the end of the year to dictate regarding funding streams, to access funding streams and kind of this 'bums on seats' culture we have - are they prioritised more than inclusivity? Suggestively, you could possibly suggest that.' (Tony, tutor)*

Market forces of income generation are thus perceived to take precedence over the quality of the educational experience for learners.

These issues and tensions are totally predictable, according to Brookfield (2005), when attempting the complex task of facilitating learning in adults within a system of bureaucratic rationality. The complexity of the learning process is reduced to an assumption that it happens at certain times in the same location with a particular curriculum (ibid). From this perspective, it is easier to understand why students feel alienated from the learning experience and they feel that tutors don't care. Higher educational standards are defined in terms of improvements in outputs – exam results. The development of the individual learner and the quality of the learning experience are not the priority (Trowler, 2003). The impact of this upon the education of students labelled as dyslexic is that they often felt excluded from the learning process, which militates against the construct of the inclusive college.

Not only is tension apparent between students and tutors, but also between tutors and management, and indeed within management itself. Yvonne's earlier account of her teaching experience illustrates conflict between herself and her manager as she is being directed by her manager to teach to a level she feels is inappropriate for some students. Then again, from a management perspective, they too, are under pressure as they are tasked with monitoring achievement. Every manager mentioned the monitoring of recruitment, retention and achievement data as a significant part of their role.

*'Obviously it's the CIT leaders ultimate...they're responsible for monitoring, but I monitor it as well, because I'm asked the questions ...*

*So yes, it's very much on my mind...' (Charlotte, manager)*

Managers are also accountable for results as they are 'asked the questions' by those further up the hierarchy. The funding formula in FE outlined in Chapter 2 operates upon the basis

of the retention and achievement of students. Thus, a considerable element of a manager's role is the monitoring of this data and the management of teaching and learning. Middle managers are under pressure from senior management for their staff to achieve the high grades.

*'It's all about the teaching and learning and it's your fault.'*

**(Charlotte, manager)**

They are accountable and as Charlotte notes, will be blamed if the results are not achieved.

Linda's comments concur with those of Charlotte:

*'It's such a demand on high grades and what you're doing, especially – I can only speak for my school – my school are working their socks off and when a high grade doesn't come you feel absolutely defeated because it's still not good enough . I think that's the ethos of this college, though, I don't know where it's come from; it's just the natural expectancy.'*

**(Linda, manager)**

Linda's comment reinforces the argument made earlier in this chapter that the dominant ethos of the case study college is one of everyone working hard to achieve the primary goal of high grades, rather than the primary goal being one of meeting individual student need to ensure every student flourishes. The pressure from senior management filters down to middle management and tutors and students. Tensions are evident between the goal of senior managers for high grades and the role of the middle manager ensuring it happens.

*'The assumption is that everybody can do it.'* **(Charlotte, manager)**

*'They don't allow for someone not to achieve high grades.'* **(Linda, manager)**

This focus upon outputs and high grades was also perceived to run contrary to inclusive processes.

*'I don't actually think it is inclusive. Sometimes decisions are made not for the benefit of the student, but for the college, for finance.'* (**Charlotte, manager**)

In addition, departments are positioned competitively against one another:

*'If you don't get the grades in your department, it's a case of – well, Public Services achieved it, so why couldn't you?'* (**Linda, manager**)

*'You will be told – if that department can do it, why can't you?'*  
(**Charlotte, manager**)

This culture of competition that senior management encourage in order to produce the desired grades in the quest to maintain the college position in the league tables, does not encourage a collegial approach to problem solving and responding to issues. Furthermore, the consequences of the push for ever improving grades within this market driven, performativity culture is that the college does not appear to be valuing the diversity of ability, assuming that everyone is capable of high grades. The consequence is a workforce of tutors who are under pressure and working hard so that they are not blamed, their teaching is not questioned.

The impact of this upon staff morale was also in evidence:

*'It's oppressive – it's an oppressive environment, absolutely -one which I'll be looking to abandon ship from very shortly.'* (**Tony, tutor**)

*'I feel like I can't do anything right....'*

*'...It's just not a very good atmosphere at all.'* (**Yvonne, tutor**)



This evidence supports the findings of commentators such as Bathmaker and Avis, (2005) and Whitehead, (2005) regarding the effects of the performativity culture in FE doing nothing to contribute to effective practices of inclusion. It may, in fact, contribute to the high turnover of staff in FE which, as discussed in Chapter 2, depletes expertise.

Returning to the question of whose interests are being served, it is interesting that the focus for high grades appears not in the interests of the learner, but in the interest of the college 'to beat other colleges', reflecting a market discourse. The consequence is that students who are experiencing difficulties in learning tend to get 'left behind', which is in opposition to the construct of the inclusive college and legislation and policy designed to promote inclusivity. Thus, a further factor that appears to militate against inclusive processes is the development of the market model in FE. The influence of wider economic, social and political changes is very apparent. Under capitalism, the marketisation of education may be seen as desirable – the 'commodification' of learning (Brookfield, 2002). Applying this to Phoebe's course, it is apparent that these courses are designed to be short but cost effective, enabling larger numbers of students to be put through the system and gain a qualification, thus generating more income for the college. Learning can be perceived as a commodity to be exchanged on the market for a qualification. It is argued that this that is the primary consideration for policy makers, rather than its use value as a learning experience (Brookfield, 2002). The funding formula for FE is linked to outputs, putting pressure upon the college to run courses efficiently and cost effectively. The consequence is that, whilst serving the fiscal interests of the college, it creates barriers to learning for some students. This data thus illustrates that the target driven nature of FE contributes to experiences of exclusion for students in FE.

### **Tutor skills and awareness**

A further issue that affected students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion was that of tutor skills and awareness in responding to student diversity in the classroom.

*'But I do think some teachers- they are very good teachers, but when it comes down to dyslexia they don't know how to teach somebody with dyslexia.'* (Sara, adult student)

A characteristic of FE is its departmentalism – each department has a good deal of autonomy in its workings, including the recruitment of staff. Adult education departments are perhaps more likely to rely upon part time staff due to the year on year changes in funding and student recruitment for adult courses. This has implications for the quality and turnover of staff, their training and qualifications and their willingness and availability to access college staff training.

Lack of tutor awareness was not limited to a particular department. It was also highlighted by students on the A level programme.

*'I do think that maybe educating teachers on what it is and maybe individually what it would be like. Teachers are always saying to me, "Oh if you just improve your written work a bit more..." Could somebody explain to them that I...actually, that couldn't really happen? And then with other people if they needed whatever...a lot of teachers seem to think that if you put words on different coloured paper then that will help. I mean I know it does with some people but it's not a one-trick thing, like, "Oh it's on blue paper now. That's going to help so much more. Thank you."'* (Carolyn, A level student)

Carolyn expresses the sentiments of many students in this study that tutors do not appear to be aware of the impact of dyslexia upon an individual and thus how to respond effectively to individual differences in the classroom, supporting the findings of Tomlinson (FEFC, 1996) and Heathcote and Brindley, (2006). Interestingly, there appears to be some

awareness of the provision of coloured paper as a reasonable adjustment. This point is also made by another student:

*'... last term he gave me everything on green paper, which isn't really my issue, but it kind of showed that he was...he was trying to do something to help.'* **(Leah, A level student)**

These experiences suggest that students are not being consulted about what reasonable adjustments are appropriate for them in the classroom. Preconceptions about dyslexia and treating these learners as a homogenous group, lead to the provision of coloured paper, which, for both students here, was not particularly helpful. Worryingly, though, is the implication in Carolyn's account that tutors may feel they have complied with the law in providing a reasonable adjustment, regardless of whether it is appropriate or sufficient. I would contend that it is essential that tutors have knowledge of their responsibilities in providing appropriate reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act, if inclusion is to be facilitated. Yet, awareness of inclusive issues may be limited.

*'I think policy awareness is lacking. You do the mandatory training because you have to. But there is so much pressure, so doing something else unless you have to do, gets put on the back burner. At this time of year it's getting students through the course. It's finding the right time.'*  
**(Charlotte, manager)**

Anna concurs:

*'...if a tutor has had a couple years without any students with various learning differences, it tends to...because you're so busy, it tends to fall off the back of your head...'* **(Anna, tutor)**

Thus, ensuring continuous professional development on inclusive issues is problematic. Tutors in FE may have subject knowledge and academic qualifications, but students point out that this is not sufficient. Effective skills in teaching a diversity of learners are also required, and this appears to be lacking, resulting in students experiencing barriers to learning, thus militating against the construct of the inclusive college. As discussed in Chapter 2, historically, FE has not necessarily required tutors to have formal teaching qualifications, their industry experience and qualifications being perceived as the most important skills. Whilst this is now changing, it is still the case that many tutors may not have formal teaching qualifications. For example, a tutor interviewed in this study was teaching unqualified for several years, and expressed concern that what he subsequently learned from the teacher training course regarding inclusive issues was not communicated to him by the college prior to him attending the course.

*'... it's been interesting to have taught for a few years and to have got the PGCE latterly... To look at was I aware, and was I implementing issues of inclusivity, when really you should be from day 1, whether you have or haven't been on teacher training. Certainly you would have hoped the organisation would have had those discussions with you while your course is pending, so it's interesting to see whether that has been the case or hasn't really.'*

***Q: And has it?***

***'Absolutely not, absolutely not.'* (Tony, tutor)**

Yet the communication of issues was raised by some students in the study as a factor that they consider contributes to their experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

*'There didn't seem to be any communication with anybody else. They'd never say, 'Oh, I think Nigel's struggling with this'. (Nigel, Level 3 vocational student)*

*'I think, like, say you've got somebody with a support need then I think communication between you and the support teacher and the teacher in the class is important for things to run as smooth as they can...' (Sara, adult student)*

*'...more awareness within teachers to recommend or to- more communication I guess, to sort of say, 'Could you talk to this student about- I know you don't have time to talk to every single student about how they're finding college, but like me, where my GCSEs were completely at odds with what I was doing... So, yeah, just more communication I think from teachers referring students...' (Leah, A level student)*

For Nigel, it appears that a lack of communication between tutors prevented his difficulties being recognised. Sara and Leah suggest that greater communication between tutors, learning support and students is required in order for issues in learning to be identified and rectified. These student views on issues with communication are supported by the comments of some tutors:

*'We definitely have policies that inform it – the new Equality Act, in October, there are nine strands of protected characteristics, all these things will add up to inclusive practice. Just how much they're advocated or not, I don't think that's particularly excessive to say the least...' (Tony, tutor)*

*'The department never lets me know of any training available. The only way I know is through the staff training brochure we get sent. When I have my performance review with my manager, he just says I need to go on the mandatory training. Dyslexia training is never discussed. It's never brought up, it's never mentioned.'* (Yvonne, tutor)

The implication here is that issues relating to equality and inclusion and associated staff training are not discussed by management with tutors. Thus, whilst policies may be in place, there appears to be little in the way of communication about them or discussion of issues that could help tutors in their practice.

Managers also commented on a lack of communication between roles and departments.

*'There is a lot of communication missing between tutors and learning support.'* (Charlotte, manager)

*'If the classroom assistant comes in for a particular student they should have the right or the platform or the confidence to say to the tutor, 'Can we sit and discuss these students?' The biggest problem here is time. We don't have time to discuss students.'* (Linda, manager)

From the students' perspectives, communication is perceived to be an important element in facilitating their inclusion and reducing barriers to learning. It appears, though, that there are issues with the college communication systems. Leah comments that it would help if tutors spent time discussing individual students – she feels her barriers to learning would have been better understood. From a management perspective, though, having the time to communicate is an issue – Linda feels there isn't the time for support staff and tutors to get together to discuss students. This view supports the comments of Fielding and Ruddock (2002) who acknowledge the difficulties for teachers in being able to spend time engaging

in dialogue with learners. They attribute this to the culture of performativity that leaves little time for such activities. This again provides evidence of the tensions between the drive for results and the inclusion of learners in the learning process, leading to a silencing of the learner voice.

Finally, whilst most tutors in this study stated that inclusion was an aspect of their teacher training course, it was interesting to note that it was treated as an element separate to the rest of the curriculum.

*'...we did a unit on learning styles and learning methods, teaching and learning and differentiation.'* (Yvonne, tutor)

Tony, who is a student on the case study college teacher training course, commented that

*'...we've just finished the inclusivity module.'* (Tony, tutor)

I would argue that, although there may be valuable input on inclusive issues, treating it as a distinct unit merely reinforces its 'separateness' and does not encourage tutors to perceive the issues to be fully embedded in their teaching and learning practices, as reflected in the construct of the inclusive college. These issues have implications for initial teacher training and the college provision of professional development opportunities and are discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Issues of communication and awareness may go some way to explaining why policies related to equality may not be fully implemented, supporting the argument made earlier that concerns with inclusion have low priority compared with concerns with retention and achievement.

Inadequate staff training on inclusion in FE, as indicated by Tony's comment above on the lack of promotion of inclusive issues, Yvonne's comment that she is not informed of

additional training on dyslexia and Charlotte and Anna's comments that this type of training tends to get pushed to the back of the queue and is a significant issue that can be seen to have an adverse effect on a tutor's ability to respond effectively to student diversity and thus militates against the construct of the inclusive college.

### **The perceived value of literacy**

Some students interviewed in this study stated that their strengths lay in practical rather than academic skills. This inevitably posed problems for these learners as the content of the curriculum often relies heavily upon theory as opposed to practical work, even in vocational education.

*'I struggled with the one year engineering course so they dropped me down to certificate level because they said I couldn't cope with the theory. But practical was no problem.'* (Mike, Level 2 vocational student)

*'I'd say I'd be better at the practical side than some people. But then, they're not interested in that, you know...only in the theory side of things.'* (Phoebe, adult student)

This can be perceived to disadvantage some learners labelled as dyslexic. Mike, for example, was placed on a lower level course due to tutor perceptions of his literacy capabilities.

There are clear implications for students' continuing disadvantage if the skills they can offer to society are not valued, thus reproducing existing economic inequalities. Those who find the acquisition of literacy skills difficult can still perform well on practical activities, but when some curriculum content is being espoused as 'better' than some other, it serves to disadvantage students who struggle to acquire the cultural capital necessary for 'success'



in education. As Bernstein (1971, in Cohen et al, 2007) argues: 'How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control' (p47). The status of 'academic' versus practical or vocational courses in the case study college was also commented on by a tutor:

*'The course leader has said in her class once when someone was messing about, 'What do you think this is – a voc (vocational) class?' There's such a divide between them and those two different sides of the department hardly speak to each other at all.'* (Yvonne, tutor)

This suggests a lack of parity of esteem between the two types of course, reinforcing the departmentalism of FE, and has implications not only in terms of the perceived value of literacy as opposed to practical skills, but also for communication and collegiality in the case study college, arguably key features of inclusive organisations (Skrtic, 2005, Ainscow, 2005).

## **Summary**

The data in this chapter revealed that classroom pedagogy often created barriers to learning for students who are labelled as dyslexic. It did not necessarily match their learning style, the underlying assumption being one of individual deficit, as the students were expected to fit into existing provision rather than classroom pedagogy adapting to respond to student requirements. Much value was attached to literacy skills in the curriculum, which created further barriers as students struggled with aspects of literacy whilst feeling that their perceived practical strengths were not recognised. The result was that the students did not necessarily feel valued. They did not feel that tutors listened, had the skills to respond to their diversity or really cared, their priorities being the achievement of high grades rather than making teaching and learning accessible and enjoyable. Staff responses to student

concerns about pedagogy were to highlight the pressures they were under for high grades, which impacted upon their teaching practice. Tension is very apparent between the market culture and inclusive processes, but ultimately tutors' professional concerns and apparent desire to be more inclusive are silenced by the system and the requirement to conform. Teacher training and professional development in inclusive issues is not prioritised. The dominant perception amongst stakeholders is of a college driven to achieve high grades rather than a college which embodies an ethos of respecting and responding to individual diversity in learning, which, arguably is vital to the promotion of equality and inclusion. How these barriers can be addressed to promote a fairer and more equitable system to facilitate inclusive processes, is the subject of Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 5: Towards an inclusive model of learning support**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the support mechanisms of the college and how far they promote inclusive processes for students who are labelled as dyslexic. In my pilot study, the focus group identified support as an important factor in facilitating their inclusion. This was therefore followed up in subsequent interviews with students and other stakeholders.

Support at the case study college is on offer in a variety of ways. Students with a label of dyslexia can receive Additional Learning Support (ALS). ALS funding is provided by the government (via the YPLA) to colleges. It can be utilised to provide a classroom assistant, small workshop, 1-1 support or the loan of a laptop and software, for example.

ALS is defined as:

...any activity that provides direct support for learning to individual learners, over and above that which is normally provided in a standard learning programme that leads to their learning goal. The need for ALS may arise from a learning difficulty and/or disability, or from support required to access a progression opportunity or employment, or from literacy, numeracy or language support requirements.

(YPLA, 2011, p27)

The case study college also promotes a range of support mechanisms set up to be available to all students in college. This includes pastoral support, personal tutor support and 1-1 academic support. 1-1 academic support is delivered by class tutors and called Academic Support Tutorials (AST). The college literature advertises AST as follows:

*‘AST is in addition to the College’s Learning Support Unit and offers extra assistance to students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia...’*

*'AST is certainly not just for students experiencing problems. Students who want the very highest grades or who need extra help to move from very good to outstanding will also benefit from the support received in AST.'* (A level prospectus, 2012)

This inclusive discourse suggests that each and every student has access to a variety of support mechanisms to facilitate their learning in a caring, nurturing environment. The rhetoric appears to be one of inclusion. This chapter explores students' experiences of support and other stakeholders' perceptions of the support mechanisms, in order to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing barriers to learning and promoting inclusion.

### **Rhetoric, reality and responsibility for learning**

Students' experiences of support varied. Nigel and Leah, for example, comment on the support in their subject area.

*'...there was no support put in place in media itself to actually help me and help the other people in the class with dyslexia. You were just expected to get on with it...*

*'...You'd literally just be put in a room and just go and send your work in to be marked. I mean, I've got friends who are actually still there. They don't actually have the support that they need to do certain things.'*

**(Nigel, Level 3 vocational student)**

*'...it feels like all the good comments have been taken and blown up and put on posters but there's not enough, like this – not enough care taken as to what are the actual problems. A lot of things say there's a lot of support and help in lessons. I mean, taking aside the dyslexia completely, a lot of my friends say they need more support, they need more help...'*

**(Leah, A level student)**

These students felt that, not only were they not receiving the required support, but that support for many students was lacking. Leah's account illustrates the gap between college intentions and the realisation of those intentions in practice. These experiences clearly do not accord with the construct of the inclusive college.

Nevertheless, not all experiences were negative. Some comments from students indicated that the support they were receiving was valued:

*'...if I've said I feel I need support, it's just been great...'* (**Sara, adult student**)

*'...since I've come to college they've given me all the support I should have had for years...'* (**Ryan, Level 2 vocational student**)

These apparent differences in experience can perhaps be better understood by distinguishing between the types of support upon which the students were commenting. Nigel and Leah were expressing dissatisfaction with the level of support from tutors in their subject areas, whereas Sara and Ryan were commenting upon additional learning support, particularly classroom assistants.

*'But when I did the assessment I got a support assistant and what a difference! All it is, a support assistant to me is, I'm not asking them to do my work for me, they're just an extra pair of ears, eyes, hands and explain things in a way I understand.'* (**Sara, adult student**)

Similarly, Ryan, as discussed in Chapter 4, appreciates being able to ask questions of the classroom assistant, rather than *'...stopping the whole class just for my little question...'*

They appear to value the classroom assistant, but it raises questions about why the class tutor is not able to ‘*explain things in a way I understand*’, suggesting issues of tutor preparation for teaching in FE, as evidenced in Chapter 4.

In many ways, the college may be perceived to be inclusive because of the provision of support. For example, a manager in this study defined inclusion as follows:

*‘It’s access for all, isn’t it, really? It’s making sure that everyone – we talk about equal opportunities, but it’s for their needs, so we do try to cater for their needs. We don’t discriminate, we do allow students with disabilities; we make sure we put the support in place.’* **(Rachel, manager)**

Rachel suggests that inclusion is enabling access to the college for all and responding by not discriminating and by arranging support. The worry is that the provision of support appears to be equated with college inclusivity. The evidence from the students, as detailed in Chapter 4 on barriers to teaching and learning, would indicate that this is not the case. Whilst students may appreciate the classroom support, they are still experiencing barriers to learning. Students felt it necessary for the classroom tutor to know about dyslexia and to know how to respond to a student’s way of learning, in order to break down the barriers to learning.

Rachel also identifies some issues with the classroom support from a management perspective.

*‘I think the main thing really is differentiation. We do tend to think that the classroom assistant is that differentiation because they still get the same activity as the rest of the group. They just get help with it. We need*

*to get that balance rather than using the classroom assistant as the tool to differentiate.*’ **(Rachel, manager)**

This view is reiterated by Norma, a classroom assistant, who comments that, in her experience there’s *‘not a lot of differentiation for different levels of ability’*, providing further evidence to support my argument in Chapter 4 that tutor training and awareness of inclusive issues appears lacking, contributing to students’ experiences of exclusion. Still, it is heartening to note that this manager realises that there is a need to review the role of the classroom assistant and tutor, suggesting that some staff may be open to opportunities for developing inclusive processes.

The idea that tutors use the classroom assistant as the means of differentiation suggests that the students’ appreciation of the in class support is because their requirements are not necessarily being met by the class tutor. This argument is further supported by Phoebe’s comment:

*‘...last week I still managed to do the same amount of work as everyone else did when I had that learning support assistant with me, so why can’t she (the tutor) sit down and do it?’* **(Phoebe, adult student)**

This evidence concurs with the views of Carrington and Elkins (2005), who state that support can actually be exclusionary in that there is then no necessity to alter the mode of delivery, further exacerbating the lack of curriculum access. This data also supports research conducted by Anderson, et al, (2003), who, as discussed in Chapter 2, found that students were concerned that having a classroom assistant to help them deflected attention away from the need to alter tutor practices. Theresa, a classroom assistant, highlights this issue as she discusses her role in class:

*'..the tutor doesn't always tune in to what you're doing as such, so...they're not huge decisions you'll be managing, there'll be like - you wouldn't need to tell the tutor that you've orchestrated getting such a textbook, or - you'd manage them in that you'd make all these suggestions that the tutor hasn't made.'* (**Theresa, classroom assistant**)

Theresa's comments indicate that the responsibility for students' learning needs is ascribed to her, as the classroom assistant. The implication is that it is perceived to be the role of learning support, rather than the classroom tutor, to manage their learning, which does not facilitate students' inclusion. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that provision of classroom support can act in an exclusionary manner, as highlighted by Leon.

*'So she moved me into the far corner, isolated me from all my friends and everybody. And since then I've had my assessment and now I'm sat next to the support assistant.'*

**Q: How do you feel about that?**

*'Well, I'm still isolated which is no fun for me, but I've got Enid sat next to me. She gives me my notes and works through things with me'.* (**Leon, vocational student**)

Farrell (2000), states that the suggestion from a wide body of international research evidence is that *'...the success of inclusion stands or falls on the availability and expertise of in class support'* (p159). Yet, as demonstrated in this study, in class support can serve to further exclude the student from participating in the classroom learning alongside their peers, if the responsibility for the student's learning is perceived to lie with the classroom assistant. Arguably, the success of in class support in facilitating inclusive processes also depends upon assumptions and attitudes towards learners and learning. Crucially, if an individualised, 'remedial' attitude towards barriers to learning is taken, as I argued in



Chapter 4, the student is perceived to be the problem. Support then reinforces student failure rather than classroom failure and perpetuates exclusionary processes. It is clear in this study that the medical model of learners is influencing the provision and operation of support to the detriment of inclusive processes, thus supporting my argument that inclusion goes beyond legislation, policy and the provision of support. There are obvious implications here for policy and for how the role of the tutor and classroom assistant are defined and understood. These are issues to which I return in Chapter 6 when discussing recommendations for the college.

### **Choice and voice**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, inclusion is premised upon giving voice to learners. I was surprised to learn of the lack of choice and control many students in this study felt they had regarding their support requirements. Leon, for example, as discussed, found himself sat next to a classroom assistant after having an assessment. Phoebe, too, describes how support was offered to her:

*'Then that was it, and she said, 'Well maybe we should get you some support in class' and that was how she left it.'* **(Phoebe, adult student)**

Phoebe had no input into the discussion. The tutor had the last word. Students generally acquiesced to the support, but there is a sense that it was because this support was preferable to no support and the fact that their ideal solution for their requirements to be met by the tutor in the classroom was not going to happen. There was a further suggestion from Carolyn, a student, on why additional learning support was given to her:

*'I just wanted extra time and they were like, "You've got to do these workshops" and I was like - apparently it's something to do with funding. They get funding for me and they've got to prove that they've,*

*like, helped me in some way... Why? That's not going to help me...I don't need that...* ' (Carolyn, A level student)

Carolyn just wanted help in exams. Her voice was not heard. The more voluble and powerful tutor voice prevailed and she attended workshops that she did not feel met her requirements.

The implication from these students' experiences is that support is sometimes imposed rather than a choice, which militates against the construct of the inclusive college if students are not involved in decisions about their support. Analysis of college policy on support sheds some light on the issues.

The college Disability Statement (attached as Appendix 18), as discussed in Chapter 4, is a key document of the college which is described as '*A guide to extra help and facilities available for students with disabilities and additional needs.*' The policy states that '*Support will be provided which encourages independence and autonomy. This will be negotiated individually to ensure success and help students move on to other opportunities in education.*'

Whilst the word 'negotiated' implies a power sharing, the following sentence appears to then remove that power to decide upon their support: '*Every effort will be made by the College to meet your needs and you will be informed of the level of support that is planned for you.*'

The policy is thus highly ambiguous in terms of outlining who will make the decisions on support provision. It also lists a range of support options which include assessments and individual programmes and the term 'specialist staff' is used to describe staff who can offer help with the range of impairments listed. The language used in the policy reveals the assumptions that are being made about learners experiencing difficulties in learning. The

discourse does not reflect inclusive principles; words such as diversity and equality are not to be found. On the contrary, a medicalised model of support is advertised, clearly locating the source of the potential barriers to learning within the individual and offering individualised solutions to overcoming these barriers. The policy also implies that responsibility for these students lies with the Learning Support Department, rather than being a whole college responsibility.

The dominant message from college policy on support is one of individual deficit. This influences tutor attitudes and practices which can be seen in, for example Phoebe's and Leon's experience to effectively exclude them from participation in the classroom teaching and learning. Classroom content and delivery avoids scrutiny and remains unaltered. Phoebe and Leon are perceived to be the problem. Their voice and their rights are denied, as is Carolyn's voice, when attempting to explain her support requirements, which is in direct contravention of the legislation. This has implications for current policy in the case study college.

The question then arises as to whose interests are being served by additional learning support? I would contend that additional learning support as it is currently operating, serves to perpetuate the status quo in maintaining existing pedagogical practices, which is not necessarily in the interests of the students.

Similar experiences of a lack of voice were in evidence regarding the provision of another type of support, the academic support tutorials, provided by class tutors.

*'...if you get a bad grade they'll put you in AST and make you come in on your study day and that kind of thing, but it seems almost like it's for their class figures...*

*' ...it's not supportive , it's almost like a punishment as opposed to it being there to help you, which sometimes makes you just not want to go,*

*which is not...I can't think of the word, it's destructive as opposed to positive. It's not helping. If I've got the attitude that you only want me in here to punish me then it does not make me want to go to AST.' (Leah, A level student)*

Leah feels that she is forced to accept this support; she perceives it to be not in her interests but in the college interests to attain results, rather than helping the student to learn, which in Leah's case, led to a level of disaffection. Other students, too, commented on feelings of being punished and being made to access 'support' that did not feel supportive, analogous to Foucault's (1977) descriptions of techniques of discipline and punishment in the exercise of power. It appears that the student voices are silenced by a system that, at all costs, must pursue high grades, with students not necessarily getting the support to meet their requirements.

Analysis of the data revealed that students in this study have experienced many years of a lack of empowerment and a lack of voice and involvement in decisions about their education. For example, Sara commented that it was discussed whether she should go to a special school, but she did not want to go.

*'...I felt, like, that's not for me, that, I'm sure they're making a mistake here...' (Sara, adult student)*

Ryan tried to exercise some control over his school education:

*'I took myself out of that lesson... so I went to the set above ...Then I got found out and they were all, you know, threatening to kick me out of the school...and I was like, well actually you'll find that I did a good piece of work and I can't do it in that environment...when everyone's fighting*

*around me. ... and then I got dragged back into this awful set...* ' (Ryan, vocational student)

For Ryan, decisions were made about the sets in which he was placed without consultation. He felt he did not belong in these sets and as a result of being there felt he was being excluded from accessing an appropriate education. He was clearly experiencing the mismatch between his learning needs and the learning environment. He tried to change his learning environment, but he was powerless to change anything. The school perception was that he was, in Ryan's words, '*a nuisance*' and threatened to exclude him. Sara and Ryan were not listened to, their opinions not sought. Little wonder then, that students often acquiesce at college. This perhaps illustrates hegemonic forces, where people learn to accept dominant beliefs as part of the natural social order (Brookfield, 2002).

The impact of the market discourse in FE upon student voice and choice only serves to perpetuate their exclusion from participation in decisions about their education and support. As demonstrated in Chapter 4 on teaching and learning issues, the influence of the market discourse is apparent throughout the data and the tensions between this discourse and the inclusion agenda are very much in evidence, resulting in barriers to learning.

## **Equity**

Fairness in support was identified in the data as an issue that militates against inclusive processes. For example, when asked about any issues regarding support Ryan related the following incident:

*'Well, this is what happened last week, and it doesn't really bother me because they must be jealous because I'm getting the support. This girl turned round to me and said, 'You know what, you're so lazy, you,' and I said, 'What do you mean?' She went, 'God, Donna does all your work*

*for you. I said, 'You what?' She went, 'You don't take any of your own notes.'* **(Ryan, Level 2 vocational student)**

The idea is that the fostering of inclusive processes should involve the support of all learners. Ryan feels some animosity towards him because he is getting help in the classroom, describing them as '*jealous*', suggesting that there is a perception among others in the class of 'unfairness'. Other students possibly resent this because actually their needs are not being met in the classroom. Maybe many students find note taking difficult or boring. In attempting to include Ryan we appear to have inadvertently excluded others in class by preventing the need for the development of alternative modes of delivery that would maybe suit more learners. This again supports my view that bolt-on support services are in many ways militating against inclusive processes by masking the need to focus on classroom pedagogy, changes in which could benefit the majority of learners, rather than some additional support benefiting a few. There may be an argument for more effective use of resources to meet the needs of all learners rather than a select few.

The case study college would contend that AST support is designed to benefit all learners, as discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Yet, a contrary view was expressed by Naomi, who stated that in some subject areas it was accessible only to selected people:

*'It's quite evident in business actually, with the A\* academy and the gifted and talented. They make a big thing about the gifted and talented. Psychology's just like, 'ASTs all round!'* **(Naomi, A level student)**

Whereas psychology offered the support to all students, in business the focus was upon the 'gifted and talented'.

*'It would be a lot better to say, Right, everyone's equal, just let's get you going at your rate', rather than saying 'Oh you're brilliant, come over*

*here' and distinguish it, because then the people that are left are like,*

*'Well, what about us?'* (Naomi, A level student)

The implication is that a pace is set that differentiates people and those who are perceived to be high achievers are offered the support. There is a strong sense of injustice from Naomi at the inequity in classroom support practices and a support policy that could promote inclusive practice is utilised to privilege some students over others.

Linking to the discussion earlier on the pressure to achieve high grades, it appears that the general support mechanisms of college, ostensibly available to all, can also be a means of treating students differentially, with those who are experiencing difficulties in learning feeling they are being punished for not conforming to the construct of the 'successful' student. Additionally, a focus upon classroom reorganisation to meet individual requirements necessitates that staff have the skills to respond to the diversity of needs of learners. My research provides evidence that this is an issue as highlighted in Chapter 4.

The students do not appear to experience the rhetoric of policy and an analysis of the discourses used highlights the underlying attitudes, assumptions and ethos that drive many college processes, which may go some way towards explaining the gap between rhetoric and reality. The tensions and conflicts illustrate the complexities of policy and its implementation. As Trowler (2003) posits, the realisation of policy in practice is not always as policy makers intended. It is subject to multiple interpretations depending upon a person's viewpoint. Policy making itself is intensely political with competing agendas and ideologies (ibid) and this is in evidence in the conflicting messages from college policies, from a rights based discourse in the Equality and Diversity Policy to a medical/deficit discourse in the Disability Statement. It is apparent that it is not enough to have policy to ensure students receive the education that is their right – it is a much more complex process. Policy making is predicated upon a particular understanding of disability (Drake,

1999). A medical or deficit focus results in policies designed to change the individual, rather than the environment. In addition, there is a concept of ‘normality’ against which learners are judged:

*‘It’s people that are average, like me. It’s just like you’re ignored a bit and there’s like the A\* academy and the extra help for the people that desperately need it and you think about the average people and then...’*

**(Naomi, A level student)**

This student measures herself against this construct of ‘average’, which underpins the value systems of the college. Students who are experiencing difficulties in learning are considered to be deviating from the so called norm and in need of additional support to help ‘fix’ their individual problems. This runs contrary to the construct of the inclusive college. As one tutor commented:

*‘Only the students who fit this certain type of person who’s capable of getting an A or a B - they’re catered for. Nobody else is.’* **(Yvonne, tutor)**

Whilst it may serve the interests of the college, this valuing only of a ‘*certain type*’ of student does not serve the interests of equality, fairness and justice. It stands in opposition to the construct of the inclusive college and the rhetoric that ‘every learner matters’. As long as it is accepted uncritically, dominant forces prevail and little will change. What is required is an ‘unmasking’ of these power systems and a challenging of the dominant ideology (Brookfield, 2005) in order to effect change to a more democratic situation. It is important that the focus is upon the disabling impact of social structures if people are to be provided with the power to change their material circumstances for the better (Drake, 1999).



The construct of the inclusive college is one where all students have rights and entitlements to an equitable education. Students who are labelled dyslexic, though, do not appear to have the opportunity to access the curriculum without recourse to additional support. The current college systems promote a response that is very individual and deficit orientated - students who are experiencing difficulties with learning are considered to require dyslexia support. In addition, for some students, access to additional learning support was tinged with stigma. For example, Naomi commented that students perceive people who attend learning support to be 'thick' and when Leah was asked what the perception of learning support was amongst students, she replied:

*'Those that go are retards and the actual place there's not much known about it.'* (Leah, A level student)

The strong deficit language and conceptualisation of learning support is perhaps not entirely surprising, given that the structure is based upon a medical model, but it serves to further highlight the question of whose interests are served by the bolt-on support. An analysis of management and tutor perspectives on the role of learning support can help to answer the question.

### **Bureaucracy, budgets and bolt-on support**

The centralised learning support service was generally seen by both management and tutors to play a very important role in the college and the bolt-on nature of the provision widely appreciated. One manager described the role as '*massive*', adding that

*'We're very lucky here; we've got fantastic classroom assistants...'*

**(Rachel, manager)**

Other responses were similar:

*'I think learning support is fantastic...I don't know whether it's seen that we are using it effectively, but I think it's a really, really positive part of this college. I think it's a really, really good department that responds to all of your needs. The minute you want any help, somebody's there to help you. If you want any advice, it's there.'* **(Linda, manager)**

*'I think it is invaluable because with me being a new member of staff I've had to come on all the training about different areas, and there's a designated person for dyslexia, a designated person for dyspraxia, you know, there's someone to go to if you have any questions about anything. I think it is brilliant how it is all so organised and sorted out...'* **(Yvonne, tutor)**

For some staff it is seen to provide a valuable service in terms of help and advice.

Describing it as 'responsive', a 'mechanism' and 'organised' alludes to a characteristic of efficiency about learning support that was perceived as positive for the majority of both tutors and managers. It also appears from Linda's comment *'I don't know whether it is seen that we are using it effectively'*, that there is an expectation that the service will be utilised, and in a particular way.

Tony comments upon why he thinks some tutors value this system:

*'...people want boxes to fit people into, I really do feel that is the case, which is for me, difficult anyway and inflexible. People want scenarios. If learner A is exhibiting these difficulties, phone this number and it's all stage processed, flow charts, educationalist perspective for me. I find it all a bit nauseating, personally.'* **(Tony, tutor)**

Whilst not necessarily subscribing to the efficacy of this bureaucratic efficiency himself, Tony suggests that, in his experience, ‘people’ like to have clear processes of referral of students that lead to labels and categories. In other words, whilst some may perceive it as a valuable advice service, it is also perceived as an efficient mechanism of processing students experiencing difficulties in learning.

*‘Tutors do refer on a lot; they really value the workshops...’ (Rachel, manager)*

This valuing of bureaucracy is, according to Whitehead (2005), a result of a culture of performativity – a culture obsessed with measurement and assessment- the consequences of which are that managers do not trust staff to make informed decisions. Staff are actively encouraged to use the systems and procedures in place for referral and ‘treatment’ of students experiencing difficulties in learning. A result of this reliance upon centralised services and ‘specialists’, is that it serves to further disempower tutors. They feel they are not equipped with the skills to respond effectively to these learners, in addition to discouraging a focus upon classroom pedagogy.

On the other hand, Yvonne and Linda felt that a major benefit of the Learning Support Department was that they could obtain advice and guidance on issues, which arguably facilitates inclusive processes if learning support staff knowledge is utilised to develop the skills and knowledge of classroom tutors. Similarly, Tony expressed a preference for being able to discuss particular students and receive some advice on strategies he could implement in the classroom:

*‘I think if something seems difficult for a learner to grasp in a classroom for whatever reason, I know that there are flowchart referral mechanisms which can guide you through ... but I think for me personally, I would just pick up a phone straight away and I see that*

*interaction as a very delicate conversation which has no names involved, just, 'Look, this is the scenario I'm getting in my classroom, can you help in this way?' (Tony, tutor)*

This approach of communicating and discussing issues with learning support tutors is more in line with the response many students desired, as evidenced in the following comments.

*...just more communication I think from teachers referring students, sort of, you know, 'Is there any way you could talk to this pupil about maybe getting tested for this, that or the other?'' (Leah, A level student)*

*'They (the teachers) didn't say, 'Right, we'll get someone', because they could have arranged - I didn't need to go through you – they could have just rung direct to say I needed someone to help with computer lessons but they didn't. There didn't seem to be any communication with anybody else.'*

**(Nigel, vocational student)**

*'If they (the teachers) can't help, if they're not sure if they're doing it right, I think communication... I think, like, say you've got somebody with a support need then I think communication between you and the support teacher and the teacher in the class is important...' (Sara, adult student)*

Then again, adopting this approach on a wide scale within the current funding arrangements is problematic. Additional learning support funding is only triggered when a student is referred through to learning support and seen by a member of the team. The collaborative role of learning support tutors, helping to inform and develop tutor skills, does not generate income for the college. The learning support manager has funding targets to meet, so in essence, referring as many students through to the Learning Support Department as possible serves the financial interests of the college.

*'I have to do a balancing act. On the one hand we have the bureaucracy and the funding which says put in as much support as possible to generate the funding, and on the other hand, we need to meet the needs of students. So I feel I have two masters, really.'* **(Dawn, manager)**

The discourse of bureaucracy, administrative convenience and income generation runs alongside the discourse of meeting learner requirements. The operation of the funding regime in this manner thus discourages potentially more inclusive approaches to responding to learner requirements and actively encourages referral of the student through the process for access to bolt-on support. As Ball (1994) asserts, '...discourses of financial planning and economic rationalism now operate in antagonistic relation to discourses of teaching and learning and pupil welfare' (p51).

In terms of Dawn's role as learning support manager, it was evident which one was her priority:

*'My role is to ensure that we run a cost effective, value for money service'.* **(Dawn, manager)**

This again suggests divisions and tensions between staff and management operating along different discourses and value bases (market forces, efficiency and budgets as opposed to curriculum, student welfare and teaching and learning), supporting Ball's (1994) assertion that these roles in educational institutions are founded less upon professional authority than skills in management. Indeed, the operational systems of the case study college have been directly modelled upon industry. A tutor explained how a previous principal was involved with a high profile factory.

*'...he had very strong links with DM and certainly the Chair of Governors for a long time was one of the CEOs of DM. So he was very*

*interested in looking at things like Total Quality Management and things like that...*’ (Pat, tutor)

The impact of the changes made as a result of this collaboration, was, in Pat’s words, a college that is ‘...*very systems driven*’.

From some students’ perspectives, the system appeared to create a barrier to their access to support.

*‘Personally, I found it quite a complicated system to go through, because there wasn’t really anyone you could go to and say, “This is what I want.” So I came- eventually, someone directed me to Learning Support. ...It’s very...it’s a lot of bureaucracy. And that’s just generally how it works...’* (Carolyn, A level student)

Naomi too, expresses similar sentiments when she says that she ‘...*didn’t know what to do, didn’t know how to get help*’. (Naomi, A level student).

The implication here is that students may find it difficult to access support due to the bureaucracy of the system and its inherent complexities. Carolyn was unsure who to ask, only ‘eventually’ being directed to the correct department and Naomi was unaware of how to access support. This may result in delays to receiving support, which does not facilitate inclusive processes, and is further illustrated with a comment from Leah.

*‘The fact that I had to come and ask for a dyslexia assessment has been ...even though when at GCSE I kind of had coping mechanisms, it wasn’t easy but it was nowhere near as hard as this. Whereas when I come in with the results I’ve got and I’m slipping down the class very slowly, maybe someone should have picked it up sooner.’* (Leah, A level student)

Of some concern too, is the fact that the onus was upon these students to be proactive in trying to find out about the support service.

This does not align itself with the construct of the inclusive college in that the students experienced barriers to access to support, rather than the institution fulfilling its 'anticipatory' duty under the Equality Act (2010) to ensure accessibility of services.

Thus, the bureaucratic system does not facilitate the type of collegial communication systems that evidently students and, indeed, some tutors, feel are required for inclusive responses to learners. However, the system of pressure for high grades and achievement of outputs does encourage the use of support. Whether this is always primarily in the interests of students, is a matter of some debate, as a comment from Pat illustrates.

*'Teachers like classroom assistants because it takes the pressure off you, and it does. But I'm not sure it's always the best. I think it's the teacher being responsible for managing learning and actually directing the classroom assistant, rather than the classroom assistant...I'm sure the classroom assistant just ends up doing the work so many times! And that horrifies me...but sometimes it's just too big for the tutor, and let's face it, if you've got a class of 20 odd very lively 16 to 19 year olds, who are not particularly academic, who don't want to sit down, you're glad for all the help you can get. I think you've got to – there has to be a strand of pragmatism as well.'* (Pat, tutor)

There is a suggestion from Pat that she feels the use of classroom assistants in this way is not ideal, but she justifies it with a discourse of pragmatic efficiency. Thus, within the bureaucratic, market led system and pressure for tutors and management to achieve the best results, the bolt-on system of learning support, whereby the student is identified as

‘deficient’ and in need of ‘remediation’ serves the system well. Yet it conflicts with the construct of an inclusive education system whereby separate provision can never mean an equitable system as some students are perceived as ‘deviating’ from the ‘norm’ and in need of ‘fixing’.

## Summary

The rhetoric of the college as providing a supportive, caring learning environment does not appear to match the experiences of students in this study. On the surface the support mechanisms appear effective. The college gets good results; learning support appears valued. It serves the purposes of administrative convenience within the bureaucratic business model. Additional learning support was generally appreciated by students, but they are still experiencing barriers to learning on a daily basis in the classroom. In class support sometimes perpetuated exclusionary practices, and appeared to work more in the interests of the tutors than the students. Thus, it was not necessarily the response they desired in order to meet their learning requirements and it often obscured the need to look critically at classroom practices.

Students have little say in the support allocated - their voices are silenced as they internalise the difficulties they are experiencing in coping with a pedagogy that does not match their learning style. The medical model prevails and power relations are maintained. This system does not facilitate inclusive processes and the rights of the students to effective teaching and learning are not enforced. This is further underpinned by policy, the assumption of which is that the Learning Support Department has designated responsibility for the management of students who are experiencing difficulties with learning.

Overall, management and tutors currently appear to accept the current structures and support mechanisms as unproblematic and value the bolt-on support. Conversely, the data from students suggests that some support mechanisms are being utilised to promote the



interests of some over others and this way, militate against the construct of the inclusive college.

Chapters 4 and 5 have addressed the factors that enhance and inhibit the construction of inclusive processes in FE for this group of learners labelled as dyslexic. Eliciting the views of stakeholders has illuminated many issues that contribute the experiences of inclusion and exclusion for these learners in the case study college. A number of barriers to learning have been identified, demonstrating that the construction of inclusive processes in FE is very complex, and goes beyond legislation and the provision of learning support. The next chapter, chapter 6 focuses upon my second research question. What follows is therefore a discussion of the main themes to emerge from the data and how some of these issues can be addressed in the case study college.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and recommendations for the case study college**

### **Introduction**

Chapters 4 and 5 analysed the factors that enhance and inhibit the level of inclusion and equality experienced by learners labelled as dyslexic in one particular FE college. This chapter now concerns itself with examining ways in which the college can develop and improve inclusive practices to enhance their learning experience.

The first part of the chapter summarises my findings as to why students labelled as dyslexic are experiencing exclusion, drawing upon theoretical considerations of power, politics and social processes. I then discuss the implications of these findings for the case study college, making recommendations for the college in a number of areas.

### **Discussion**

Evidence from this study supports the assertions of Riddick (2001) that dyslexia is generally conceptualised within a psycho-medical or psychological framework that focuses upon the individual ‘deficits’ of the learner and their ‘difference’ from the ‘norm’, providing ‘treatment’ of these ‘deficits’ by way of individual support. Dyslexia is not conceptualised within a framework of students’ rights to equity and inclusion in education as reflected in the construct of the inclusive college. This is demonstrated in the dominant discourses identified in the interviews with stakeholders and in college policy. Data from the students in Chapters 4 and 5 illustrates that the consequences of this medicalisation of dyslexia are that they experience exclusion from an equitable learning environment, subject to ineffective teaching and learning approaches, being labelled as ‘different’ and provided with support that often does not meet their requirements or perpetuates exclusionary processes. Furthermore, this study has provided evidence that the medical model is perpetuated by the dominant bureaucratic business model of FE where

administrative convenience is to the fore. Indeed, the current operation of the case study college, as evidenced in Chapter 5, has been modelled upon a particular manufacturing company, further emphasising the business and bureaucratic nature of the college.

Evidence from Chapter 5 illustrated that tutors and managers perceive the bolt-on learning support system to be a valuable mechanism for addressing the requirements of students experiencing difficulties in learning labelled as dyslexic. Whilst staff generally expressed a commitment to the principles of inclusive learning, the practice of implementation was more problematic. Working within a pressurised, performativity culture where they are assessed by results, lectures are fast paced and often didactic to cover the syllabus and work is constantly remarked and exams retaken to improve grades. The additional responsibilities for recruitment, retention and marketing, in addition to the pressure to achieve high grades, mean that tutors feel overworked and there is little time for preparation as they are faced with an increasingly diverse student population. Their priorities, as dictated from further up the hierarchy, are the achievement of targets. They feel ill-equipped to respond effectively and feel there is little time to develop their skills. Thus, referring a student to learning support for a 'remedy' means that they can continue with the rest of the class and the responsibility is diverted away from issues of pedagogy and skills.

The data from the students labelled as dyslexic in Chapters 4 and 5 suggests that this does not facilitate their inclusion in education. They provide compelling accounts of their experiences in the classroom of ineffective teaching and learning and support. This has implications for initial teacher training in FE and for continuing professional development. This also illustrates the inherent tensions between policies of marketisation and policies of inclusion, supporting Lim and Tan's (1999) view that market principles in education have detrimental effects upon inclusive processes as attention is focused upon those learners who will contribute most to the achievement of these targets. Within these competing

discourses, student voices are often effectively silenced, as evidenced in the data. They have little power or involvement in the construction of policy; thus dominant voices prevail and exclusionary processes are perpetuated. This has implications for student empowerment and involvement in policy and provision rather than the perceived tokenistic treatment it currently receives. Again within this performativity culture, it becomes more of what Whitehead (2005) describes as a 'tick box' exercise – the students in this study perceive that genuine involvement in decision making does not happen. There is also evidence in the data of tensions between tutors and management as management attempt to implement policies upon which the survival of the college depends. Lack of communication was a key issue. Discussions around inclusive processes rarely took place. Still, there is evidence of a significant level of compliance from staff, albeit often creating personal dilemmas between their professional values and survival at work. This placed them under even greater stress as they felt pressured with the workload, often perceived to go unrecognised or hidden from senior management. Again, the tutor voice is often silenced in this- overridden and legitimated by the dominant market discourse. This leads to pressures and tensions between management, tutors and students in the pursuit of the major goal – high grades. Demoralisation amongst staff was in evidence, supporting the conclusions of Bathmaker and Avis (2005) and Whitehead's (2005) findings on the detrimental impact of the performativity culture in FE which does nothing to contribute to effective practices of inclusion. In contrast, the evidence from this study suggests that these factors contribute to students' experiences of exclusion in the case study college. This has implications not just at local level, but across the sector and is discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Recommendations**

From an analysis of the results, some suggestions can be proposed for recommendations to develop more inclusive processes in the case study college.

## Policy formulation

Analysis of college policy suggests that it has developed in the college in a piecemeal fashion, in response to external pressures such as legislation or inspection. Analysis identified a lack of coherence with conflicting discourses between policies. Current policy operates according to Loxley and Thomas' (1997) concept of 'systemic dualism' – the Learning Support Policy advocating specialist bolt-on provision alongside 'mainstream' teaching and learning. Policy is also influenced by how we conceptualise disability (Drake, 1999). As dyslexia is conceptualized and defined within a medical model in the case study college, policy reflects discourses of individual deficit and treatment. A reframing of dyslexia within the context of a social model is arguably more appropriate in terms of asserting these students' rights to an equitable education. In addition, the policy of bolt-on provision requires review, as it is evident from the data from students that this reinforces a deficit conceptualization of dyslexia, which in turn creates barriers to learning preventing their full inclusion.

- The web of policies in the case study college should be reviewed to provide coherence across policies and the language of policies altered to reflect a social model and rights discourse rather than a medical model and deficit discourse.

## Initial teacher training

A major theme to emerge from analysis of the students' experiences was their explicit requests for effective teaching and identification of more staff training to promote their inclusion. Students frequently cited a general lack of awareness amongst tutors on how to respond effectively to the diversity of their learning requirements. Whilst tutors were often perceived to have good subject knowledge, it was in the effective communication of this knowledge that there were issues. The literature indicates that the history of staff training in FE is complex, a contributory factor being that many tutors perceived themselves to be vocational specialists rather than professional teachers (Lucas, 2004). Thus, there may be

resistance at some level to teacher education. Yet, preparation for teaching plays an important role in enabling cultures of inclusion (Forlin, 2010). Whilst there has been a greater recognition of the need for tutors in FE to have a teaching qualification in addition to relevant industrial/vocational experience, and case study college data indicates that 99% of established tutors and 92% of contracted tutors do in fact have or are working towards a teaching qualification, my research indicates that there are continuing issues with tutor skills in effective teaching of students labelled as dyslexic. Tutors in this study commented that issues relating to responding to diversity were often an element of the teacher training course as a bolt-on unit. Yet, research indicates that teachers had more positive attitudes towards inclusion when their training programme embedded inclusive issues rather than treated it as a separate module (Kim, 2011). A bolt-on unit only serves to replicate dominant conceptualisations of the ‘separateness’ of disability and learning difficulty and reinforce its ‘specialist’ domain (ibid). In the case study college, inclusive issues are delivered as a stand-alone unit by a learning support tutor. This may unintentionally serve to promote the medical model and the ‘expert’ discourse, which arguably runs counter to a response based on the social model and equal rights. Whilst the structure and content of initial teacher training courses may be a government issue, at a local level:

- The delivery of the content of initial teacher training programmes should reviewed in the case study college to ensure that it is promoting an embedded approach that involves challenging predominant conceptualisations of dyslexia as an individual deficit that learning support can remedy, to a student’s right to an education from the class tutor free from pedagogical and attitudinal barriers.
- It is recommended that the policy on staff recruitment should be reviewed. Reducing the timescale allowed for the acquisition of a teaching qualification once employed is suggested.

## Continual professional development

Continual professional development (CPD) in the case study college on dyslexia and other impairments is delivered by learning support staff considered to be and referred to as 'specialists'. The attendance at these sessions is voluntary and – for many reasons - not very well attended. In addition, the content is focused upon 'awareness raising'. The evidence from this study suggests that tutors do not prioritise this training. Tutor knowledge and awareness of issues is patchy and students are not always asked about helpful strategies or listened to by tutors. In addition, communication within teams and between departments regarding inclusive processes is an issue. They do not feel equipped or empowered to respond effectively to learners.

- It is recommended that the delivery of CPD training should be reviewed and a model of delivery which is embedded into compulsory, general training on teaching and learning is adopted, that emphasises the power and impact of effective strategies on the learning of all students.
- The content of these sessions should not just raise awareness of dyslexia but attempt to challenge existing preconceptions, focusing not upon 'individual deficits' but on pedagogical and attitudinal barriers.
- It is recommended that the training should also involve learners in the content and delivery, to enable their voices to be heard.

## Teaching and learning

An inclusive education system requires high quality provision and tutors skilled in its delivery (The Skills Commission, 2010). The data from students in this study indicated that teaching was not always effective and they identified a range of teaching strategies that promoted their exclusion and inclusion. They frequently commented that tutors appeared to have the subject knowledge but not always the skills in teaching this knowledge. It is evident from the accounts of the students in my research that what is required is the

development of more creative and innovative pedagogies that take account of diverse learning styles. Their experiences were patchy, indicating a need for more collegiality between staff and departments in the sharing of ideas and practices. The evidence from tutors indicates that they would welcome the time to develop their creativity in teaching methods in addition to the opportunity to use them. Developing inclusive practices involves time and preparation (Rose, 2000). This may involve an element of risk taking on the part of the college – the evidence from this study has indicated that the main focus is upon the achievement of high grades, fostering a competitive culture between departments and tutors. In addition, it leaves little time for reflection and discussion of inclusive issues as the quest for high grades appears to dominate discussions and practice.

Nash, et al (2008) found that vocational pedagogy was characterised by mechanistic assessment methods, coaching and an emphasis upon evidencing, tracking and signing off competencies and targets – techniques that are devoid of teaching content. This, they contend, is a consequence of the pressures for high grades in addition to a concern that those identified as ‘vulnerable’ should - and expect to - ‘achieve’. These findings resonate with the experiences of students in this study who didn’t feel they were being taught and some tutors who felt that an inordinate amount of their time was spent upon re-marking and feedback in an effort to improve grades. Considering the historical ‘Cinderella’ position of vocational education, one can concur with the argument posited by The Skills Commission (2010) that vocational tutors and vocational pedagogy have largely been neglected, which has had a significant impact upon the learning experience of students. Removing barriers to learning not just for students labelled as dyslexic, but for all learners, requires tutors skilled in teaching. This suggests that vocational pedagogy in the case study college requires critical review, particularly as the proposed extension of the compulsory school leaving age to 18 by the year 2015 will mean an increase in the demand for high



quality vocational education and skilled tutors for its delivery (The Skills Commission, 2010).

Changes to pedagogy, however, are not sufficient - as Ainscow (2005) posits, if students are conceptualised as 'deficient' and perceived as either in need of 'fixing' or beyond 'fixing' – even the most innovative practices are not likely to work. The development of pedagogy has to be underpinned by a challenge and change to the hegemonic perceptions of some students as problematic due to their inherent 'deficits'. This is not an easy task. Nonetheless, tutors should be encouraged to accept that responding to diversity is a complex process involving competing agendas and therefore should not feel uneasy about their abilities (Ellis et al, 2008). In addition, being encouraged to develop innovative and critical practice will be arguably more empowering and less stressful than passively accepting the status quo (ibid).

- It is recommended that issues of effective teaching and learning approaches should be prioritised for discussion in team, departmental and cross college meetings, with time given for collaborative work and critical reflection. Brookfield (1995) describes critical reflection as 'assumption hunting' – identifying hegemonic assumptions about one's own teaching practice and questioning their validity. For example, one might assume that group work is an effective and democratic teaching and learning activity. Conversely, it may also provide a forum for more confident learners to dominate discussions and for others to be silenced, therefore proving to be anti-democratic.
- A review of vocational pedagogy should be implemented and a programme of staff development devised that focuses upon effective teaching and learning strategies rather than assessment and coaching.

## Empowerment of learners and tutors

Teaching takes place within particular political, psychological and social learning contexts that are infused with power (Brookfield, 1995). As the data from this study illustrated, students labelled as dyslexic were conceptualised within a medical/psychological framework. Where the medical model dominates, it leads to responses based upon deficit and remedy – changing the individual rather than changing the environment (Drake, 1999). Thus the power to effect changes is removed from learners as they are perceived to be the ‘problem’. The accounts of students in this study illustrated how they often experience disempowerment as their voice is silenced by the more powerful and voluble tutor and they are given little choice or control over how their learning requirements are met. The views of professionals on issues of disability and difficulties in learning are given more credibility than the views of the learners themselves (Corbett, 1998).

Then again, the data also revealed a highly charged, market driven, bureaucratic organisational structure within the college, with a strict hierarchy of line management. Tutors reported a lack of communication and collegiality within this framework and an ethos of performativity and accountability restricting their freedom. Within this highly managed environment they are expected to follow processes and procedures, even though, as the data illustrated, it often created dilemmas. Thus, tutor voices too, were often silenced by the system as they complied for the sake of administrative convenience.

The starting point for the development of inclusive processes is the involvement of those who have been excluded in decisions on policy and practice (Swain and Cook, 2005) with ‘authentic’ listening (Fielding and Ruddock, 2002). How far the college is prepared to do this is debatable, as it will entail challenging hegemonic assumptions about learners and learning. It can nevertheless be facilitated by working towards a conceptualisation of difficulties in learning that focuses upon structural and attitudinal barriers rather than

learner 'deficits'. If tutors feel they are equipped with the skills to respond to diverse needs, they may be more likely to listen to and engage with the learner.

- College should recognise that students labelled as dyslexic are experiencing inequality as a result of a lack of acknowledgement of their views.
- It is recommended that policy making should involve eliciting the views of those upon whom it will have an impact. This is particularly relevant for learning support policy and provision.
- The personal tutor agenda should be highlighted as an opportunity to engage the learner in discussions on barriers to learning they may be experiencing and encourage tutors to view the student as the 'expert'.
- It is recommended that more time should be allocated for discussion and debate amongst tutors, learners and learning support staff on inclusive issues to facilitate the empowerment of staff and learners.

### Review of support

Whilst additional learning support was generally valued by the students, analysis of the data suggested that it was often accepted as a compromise to their preference of having their learning requirements met by the classroom tutor. Whilst it is argued that in-class support is vital to the success of inclusion (Farrell, 2000), the experiences of the students in this study indicated that support was sometimes contributing to their exclusion rather than their inclusion in the classroom. There was a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities between support workers and tutors and often the support worker was responsible for the student's learning. In addition, attending the Learning Support Department for separate tuition, although generally valued, was sometimes felt to be stigmatising and reinforcing their 'difference'.

This indicates that a review of current support processes is required. The demand for assessment, identification and labelling of students is so great that my role and that of other

colleagues in the team currently leaves little time for liaison and discussion with tutors across college and the opportunity to promote effective strategies and skills in the classroom. Yet, it is argued that collaboration is critical to the development of inclusive processes (Skrtic, 2005, Ainscow, 2005) and more work and discussion with tutors on classroom strategies may reduce the demand for separate support for students.

Whittaker and Kenworthy (1997) argue for the ‘dismantling’ of the machinery of ‘special’ provision in FE and clearly the students in this study found the current system to inhibit rather than promote inclusive processes. A continuing issue for support is thus whether systems can operate to respond effectively to the diversity of students’ requirements without recourse to differential provision for some students (Norwich, 1999). Without a major restructuring of FE funding mechanisms at national level, this dilemma is unlikely to be resolved any time soon. For the case study college it is perhaps more constructive to consider implementing the changes already discussed to provide stronger foundations for diminishing the reliance upon centralised services.

- It is therefore recommended that time should be made available for collaborative work between learning support staff and classroom tutors to facilitate their empowerment and demystify the ‘specialness’ of learning support. A greater sharing and disseminating of skills and knowledge is required, rather than each working in their own- often insular - department.
- The role of the classroom assistant should be reviewed. Giangreco (1997) suggests that in-class support facilitates inclusive processes when the support worker is supporting the whole class, rather than being attached to individual students. This also necessitates the class tutor taking responsibility for the education of students experiencing difficulties in learning, rather than the classroom assistant managing the learning of these students.

### More effective processes of inclusion

As a college we should be interrogating our rhetoric and constantly critically analysing our values and processes for exclusionary tendencies. The assumption of the college that everyone can attain high grades implies a lack of valuing of the diversity of ability. Many who struggle to attain the high grades are referred for support and labelled as somehow 'deficient'. The hegemonic ideas of learner deficits should be challenged. The lack of parity of esteem between vocational and academic courses and tutors should be addressed. We need to refocus upon an appreciation of and valuing of all abilities and skills. This means that university should not be upheld as the first choice progression route for all learners.

The evidence from this study indicates that there are current teaching practices and procedures that discriminate against students labelled as dyslexic in respect of creating barriers to learning. Current anti-discrimination legislation, namely the Equality Act (2010), requires educational institutions to identify exclusionary, discriminatory practices, by carrying out equality impact assessments. An impact assessment is a process intended to 'ensure that policies, services and functions are all designed from the start with disabled people in mind' (DDA Briefing, LSDA, 2005). There is a requirement to identify and eliminate policies and practices that currently discriminate against disabled learners (ibid).

- It is recommended that more emphasis and resources should be given to opportunities for employment for learners who do not wish to progress to university and we should celebrate and appreciate the enormous value of practical skills to society and the economy – skills which many students labelled as dyslexic in this study felt were their strengths.
- Impact assessments should be more widely publicised and training given to staff. There should be processes in place to ensure they are utilised and monitored and

learners are involved in the process of impact assessments, in order to promote more inclusive courses, modules, resources and policies.

- Finally, a culture of encouraging debate and discussion of inclusive issues is recommended whilst appreciating the complexities of factors that contribute to the construct of the inclusive college. If we are encouraged to be an institution on the ‘move’ as Ainscow (2005) states, it requires a period of turbulence. Encouraging the perception of student diversity as an asset rather than a problem requires a different kind of organisation – non-bureaucratic and problem solving – adhocratic rather than bureaucratic (Skrtic, 2005).

These recommendations reflect my theoretical argument that the construct of the inclusive college involves much more than policy and legislation. It is far more complex and multifaceted, characterised by tensions, dilemmas and contradictions. The literature review in Chapter 2 outlined the different discourses embodied in the concept and enactment of inclusion, proposed by Dyson (1999). The ‘rationale’ of inclusion is concerned with rights and ethics and efficacy discourses and the ‘realisation’ of inclusion in practice relates to political and pragmatic discourses. There was no evidence from this study to suggest that stakeholders did not believe in the efficacy of inclusion, *per se*. On the contrary, the data suggests that there is a desire on the part of stakeholders to be more inclusive. The challenge is in creating more inclusive processes within a highly charged, bureaucratic, market driven system. Thus, if the case study college is to move forward in developing these processes, there is a requirement to address issues relating to the realisation of inclusion. This involves challenging current college policy and practices to effect change, reflecting Dyson’s political discourse. It also entails identifying features and characteristics of inclusive settings and how they can be achieved – aligned to the pragmatic discourse. Supporting the views of Flem and Keller (2005), the evidence from this study indicates that developments in inclusive processes involve changes to the structure and organisation

of the institution, pedagogy and values and attitudes that ‘are part of an ongoing process that may never end...’ (ibid, p34). It also involves an appreciation that, as Wearmouth, et al (2003) recognise, changes to policy within a wider national context may be necessary before the paradoxes and contradictions can be resolved at a local level. The following chapter thus addresses research question number 3 and discusses the implications of the findings of this study for the wider FE sector.

## **Chapter 7: Wider implications of the research**

### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses my final research question and examines what this study can tell us about FE generally and inclusion. It also outlines the contribution of the study to the theory and practice of education and discusses issues raised in conducting the research that may be worthy of further study.

This is a small scale study conducted in one FE college; therefore caution must be exercised in the extent to which the findings may be generalised. Each FE institution has its own unique characteristics, ethos and demographic (James and Biesta, 2007).

Nonetheless, strong data has been gathered from stakeholders, which illuminates many issues pertinent to the FE sector as a whole. General themes can be identified that may be of relevance to other FE institutions and to policy makers.

### **Implications for the FE sector**

#### **Policy**

Policy making is always political with particular groups, interests and ideologies competing to influence educational policy (Trowler, 2003). As illustrated in this study, the policy of the marketisation of FE has had a number of perhaps unintentional consequences that run counter to the national policy of the promotion of inclusive education. For example, Riddell et al (1995) warned of the dangers of the policy of consumer choice creating an imbalance of power between different groups of learners according to their label. They concluded that power was likely to accede to those labelled as dyslexic who are predominantly from middle class families and well supported by charities and advocacy groups. This is in contrast to other groups of learners labelled with, for example, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties, originating predominantly from working class backgrounds and rather less well supported. Within the



current funding mechanism of allocating a limited pot of money for additional learning support, it is often the dyslexia label that is utilised as a lever to gain a share, often at the expense of other learners (Feiler and Gibson, 1999). This calls into question the equity of the current system of funding in promoting inclusive processes in FE. Dyson (2001) too, questions the efficacy of the system in terms of the extent to which such a small amount of 'top up' help can impact upon the learning experience. The current funding mechanism encourages a bolt-on system of support, which, as the data in this study suggests, can promote exclusionary practices rather than inclusion. This indicates the need for a review of additional learning support funding mechanisms in FE to promote more inclusive systems of provision.

Much decision making in a market environment is led by financial not educational motivations, the 'short-termism' (Whittaker and Kenworthy, 1997) of measuring competencies, generating income and getting learners through the system as quickly as possible (ibid). This model in FE relies upon administrative convenience, leading to a valuing of centralised learning support services, which, as discussed previously, reinforces a medical 'deficit' conceptualisation of learners labelled as dyslexic, leading to exclusionary practices. This study has thus highlighted the question of whether the bureaucratic business model is the best model for FE. The system, Whitehead (2005) notes, is incredibly stressful as 'the target culture can never be assuaged' (p18). The achievement of high grades one year leads to a higher target the next year. As one manager in my study commented, *'How far can we go? When will the bubble burst? Where does it all end?'* (Linda, manager). The current culture of performativity embedded in the bureaucratic business model 'diminishes' staff (Whitehead, 2005). It reduces their autonomy and decision making abilities and is effectively demotivating.

In addition, this highly managed funding and audit culture poses a threat to the quality of teaching (James and Biesta, 2007) as this study illustrated. Thus, I concur with the

conclusions of James and Biesta (2007) that management and funding changes are required in FE which involve a valuing of positive learning outcomes that go further than the gaining of a qualification. The government policy of the measurement of the effectiveness of FE colleges by high grades and 'added value' has unintended consequences which work against the construct of the inclusive college. The obsession with passing a test or gaining a qualification is at the expense of developing knowledge and critical thinking and skills for employability. It begs the question of whether the bureaucratic business model is truly meeting the aim of the government in developing a highly skilled, competitive workforce. Government must acknowledge the inherent tensions in the policies rather than assume they are congruent, if inclusive issues in policy are to be addressed.

### Teacher preparation for FE

There have been greater moves towards the professionalization and training of FE tutors in recent years. A major review of qualifications in the sector took place in 2007 resulting in the introduction of a new qualification structure and a professional body – the Institute for Learning. All tutors in FE are required to register with IFL and evidence 30 hours per year of CPD in order to maintain membership. This has been a positive development for teacher professionalism in FE. On the other hand, it is disappointing to note that, within these qualifications, equality and diversity is not only a bolt-on unit in, for example, the Certificate to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLTS), but it is an optional unit. As discussed previously, Kim (2011) found that teacher awareness of and commitment to inclusive principles was more in evidence when inclusive issues were embedded in general teaching and learning approaches rather than as an added unit. In addition, Kim found that the content and quality of many teacher training programmes varied widely, contributing to differing levels of preparation for teaching affecting knowledge and attitudes regarding inclusive good practice. In FE, the diverse backgrounds of tutors coupled with the variety of training routes into the profession I suggest would further contribute to patchy levels of

preparedness to respond to diversity. The Skills Commission (2010) is arguing for the 2 regimes of school teacher training and post compulsory teacher training to be merged and it is a possible consideration to simplify the system and hopefully provide more consistency of provision. Ofsted is due to undertake a review of the quality of FE sector courses in 2011/2012. It is hoped that this will provide the impetus for government policy makers to review the current structure of courses and at the very least, look towards fusing inclusive practice within general education rather than reinforcing the current medical model of separate provision which serves to perpetuate exclusionary processes.

### Pedagogy

The comments from many students in this study that tutors were equipped with good vocational knowledge but not necessarily the skills to deliver it effectively, support the conclusions of the Skills Commission (2010) that subject specific knowledge has to be accompanied by skills in teaching. Historic inequities in FE persist such that the system currently focuses upon academic education - vocational tutors and pedagogy are largely ignored, affecting students' learning (ibid). Currently, there appears to be a focus upon assessment of learning rather than assessment for learning, within vocational courses. The government's reforms of FE and their vision for a more skilled and competitive workforce involve developing apprenticeships, committing to increasing the number available by up to 75,000 by 2014/15 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010). When reviewing the current Coalition government's plans for the development of vocational education and training, including apprenticeships, I found many recommendations relating to structure and provision, but unfortunately no mention of teaching and learning. The construct of the inclusive college requires effective teaching to a diversity of learners. I would argue, therefore, that the government's plans should be accompanied by a critical review of vocational pedagogy as a matter of national priority, to promote more effective skills of teaching and learning.

## **The contribution of the study to the theory and practice of education**

As FE is still under-researched (James and Biesta, 2007, Mather, et al, 2008), this study contributes to existing knowledge on this unique sector of education. In particular, research into FE and learners labelled as dyslexic is very sparse, despite increasing numbers of these students entering post compulsory education in recent years. This study gives voice to these learners within the context of FE and thus also contributes to the small, but growing, body of literature on the student voice. Listening to the student voice has highlighted a number of issues relevant to the theory and practice of education. In line with other researchers, it has confirmed the need for a review of initial teacher education in FE and how well it equips new entrants to the profession with the skills to respond effectively to a diversity of learners. Crucially, it has identified the detrimental impact that the bureaucratic, market driven system of education in FE has upon the learning and support experiences of students labelled as dyslexic and the tensions it creates for learners, tutors and management in attempting to respond to apparently conflicting policies. Widening participation initiatives and international and national policies and legislation promote the inclusion of all learners in education and the valuing of diversity. Yet, alongside this is the policy of marketisation that has given rise to a pernicious culture in FE of high grades, which by its very nature, does not value the diversity of ability. Classroom pedagogy is affected as it focuses less upon effective teaching and learning approaches for all students than the passing of tests. Support mechanisms do not necessarily promote inclusive processes, with a bolt-on system driven by the promotion of a 'deficit' conceptualisation of dyslexia for the sake of bureaucratic and administrative convenience. This research raises significant questions for government and policy makers about the efficacy of maintaining such a market driven bureaucratic system and funding mechanism that measures achievement by qualifications not skills, whilst wishing to develop a highly skilled and globally competitive workforce. If the quest for more inclusive educational processes

founded upon a social model of rights, equity and social justice is not to resonate with empty rhetoric, an urgent review of the FE system is required.

### **Further research questions and issues**

This study is limited in its ability to address the multiplicity of issues surrounding the construct of the inclusive college but was useful in indicating some important potential areas for further research.

Firstly, it is argued (Farrell, 2000, Rose, 2000) that in class support is vital to the development of inclusive processes. In this regard, and in view of the issues that this study highlighted with its implementation, I would suggest that further research is carried out to inform staff development programmes for tutors and support workers.

Secondly, completely independently of this research, I was asked by my manager to conduct a lesson observation that she could not attend. I found it extremely enlightening. Observing the dynamics of the classroom helped me to appreciate the complexities of the interactions that take place from moment to moment and I viewed first-hand many processes that contribute to students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This led me to conclude that classroom observations could be a potentially very fruitful means of contributing to the issues under discussion. As this study involves a critical analysis of classroom practice, it may be expected that observations of practice would take place. However, I chose not to utilise observations in this study as my focus was upon valorising the student voice.

Finally, this was a small scale study of one FE college and I can make no claims to the findings being generalisable to other colleges. Every college has unique characteristics. Nevertheless, it has made an incredibly valuable contribution to my personal practice and has been very important in highlighting how inclusive practices can be developed in the case study college. It would be useful, therefore, to extend this study to a range of other FE

institutions to further substantiate the findings and highlight ways in which the sector as a whole can respond more effectively to the diversity of all of its learners.

### **Reflexive Analysis**

Reflecting upon the methods utilised in this study I found the use of semi structured interviews a very rich and illuminating source of data, in terms of highlighting relevant issues and that students appeared to really welcome the opportunity to speak frankly, as typified by a comment from Leah:

*'Erm, I don't quite know how to put this. It's like people who've given interviews like this or put comments on, it feels like all the good comments have been taken and blown up and put on posters but there's not enough like this – not enough care taken as to what are the actual problems.'*

**(Leah, A level student)**

I felt the interviews were a means of genuinely giving the students a platform and a voice rather than more 'tokenistic listening' to which Leah alludes. Although transcribing the interviews myself was extremely time consuming, it gave me the added benefit of having to listen very carefully to the recording and therefore being able to notice the nuances in conversation that may not have been readily apparent from reading a transcript– for example, when a comment was made humorously or sarcastically. I feel I may have lost something in the interpretation had I not transcribed myself.

If I were to conduct this study again there are certain things I would do differently. I would endeavour to make time for respondent validation from all participants. I found it very useful to discuss my interpretation of participants' data with them and their feedback provided me with further clarification on some issues, in addition to strengthening confidence in my interpretation of the data.

I would also focus exclusively upon qualitative data - In the pilot study I trialled a questionnaire, but did not pursue this in the main study. I felt the questionnaire did not offer sufficient detailed data and I found its interpretation problematical. For me it created more questions than answers; thus its utility lay more in giving me some ideas of points to pursue in interviews.

Conducting this study has led me to conclude that qualitative research is a difficult and challenging undertaking. A particular challenge for me has been to recognise the personal values and beliefs I brought to the research. I have worked in learning support for thirteen years and was so immersed in the custom and practice of learning support traditions of 'care' and 'protection' that it took the powerful narratives of the students' experiences to jolt me out of my political complacency. At times it has been very uncomfortable to confront my practices and realise my vested interests and that they may not necessarily work in the students' interests. I had to learn a method of identifying my beliefs and values as I did not always recognise them. This I did by trying to be alert to my reactions to what others said. Did I agree or disagree? Was my reaction one of anger or sympathy? I have found this to be a constant challenge. Consequently, I am now much more aware of the political context within which I work. I wholeheartedly subscribe to values of justice, equity, fairness and rights and believe that these values can be achieved by changes to institutional structures and practices. Then again, I must admit to the difficulties in constantly interrogating my discourses and practices due to the pressures of my current role and the requirement to work within a deficit orientated bureaucratic system driven by administrative convenience.

The research has thus prompted much thought on my practitioner role. I realise I have unwittingly absorbed the language, practices and discourses of the medical model, influenced by a system that requires, in my role as an assessor, that I make a 'diagnosis' on the basis of the identification of 'individual deficits'. I have had to confront and

acknowledge my use of language and that I may inadvertently be contributing to processes of exclusion by reinforcing certain models in my own discourses. As Benjamin (2005) comments: '...as a professional working with people who have been categorised, it is all too easy to find myself colluding with practices that objectify people with whom I work' (p188).

Conducting this research has helped me to realise that in order to further inclusive processes for these students, it requires a move away from a deficit orientated approach to meeting their requirements. This means some relinquishing of my 'specialist' status and 'expert' label so that all tutors are empowered to feel they have the skills to respond the diversity of learners presented to them in the classroom without necessarily perceiving specialist provision as the first port of call.

At one point, I became deeply uncomfortable with my power to label, my role resonating with Foucault's (1977) ideas of 'surveillance' and the 'medical gaze'. Simultaneously I was grappling with the 'ideological dilemma' (Norwich, 1999) that this was required in order for them to gain access to resources. I had to find a way to negotiate my way through this.

A starting point was the changing of aspects of my practice to attempt to reduce some of this power differential. I now always explain that this is a label they control – they can accept it or reject it and I explain its benefits and potential disadvantages. I have changed the way I explain what dyslexia means. I no longer just describe the biological facets, but explain the structure of the education system and the value that society attaches to literacy, in terms of their roles in creating barriers to learning. I am going beyond the label of dyslexia to a focus upon pedagogy. I am encouraging other tutors and management to adopt a similar perspective by refocusing attention upon the implications of the assessment for the recognition of an individual's strengths, weaknesses and learning styles to inform



classroom practice, rather than the assessment merely conferring eligibility for bolt-on support.

A further challenge on this research journey has been my dual role as tutor and researcher. My professional role and the relationship I have with the participants in the organisation had positive and negative effects. It was certainly advantageous in securing access to people and gaining the willing cooperation of so many people. On several occasions staff would say, 'Is this OK?' 'Is this the kind of thing you want?' They were obviously keen to be helpful. As a researcher I feel I have been privileged with honesty and candour from the participants. This is reflected in comments such as: '*You might not like what I have to say*'. Students, tutors, managers and classroom assistants expressed obvious frustrations and difficulties, but the college culture requires compliance. I had to balance the need for my participants to express the issues in order to find some solutions, with the need to protect individuals from possible consequences of not conforming to (particularly managerial) behaviours of compliance and promotion of a positive image of the college. They entrusted me with their thoughts and feelings. I have felt an incredible responsibility to do justice to their data. I, too, feel a certain vulnerability, as I am employed by the institution I am researching. Nonetheless, I hope, and believe, that the study will be embraced in the spirit of continuous improvement.

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**Appendix 1: Categories of learning difficulty on the Individualised Learner Record (The Information Authority, 2011)**

<b>Description</b>	The learner's main learning difficulty
<b>Reason required</b>	To monitor the extent and effect of learning difficulties
<b>Valid entries</b>	
01	Moderate learning difficulty
02	Severe learning difficulty
10	Dyslexia
11	Dyscalculia
19	Other specific learning difficulty
20	Autism spectrum disorder*
90	Multiple learning difficulties
97	Other
98	No learning difficulty
99	Not known/information not provided

**ALL RETURNS**

Notes	Validation Rule
<b>All learners</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>If the learner considers himself or herself to have a learning difficulty, this field should be used to record the learner's main learning difficulty and must be a valid code from the above list</li><li>Where a learner has more than one learning difficulty, the main one should be recorded.</li><li>Where there are two or more of equal severity, code 90 should be used.</li><li>Where the learner has no learning difficulty, code 98 should be used.</li><li>This field should be completed on the learner's self-assessment.</li><li>It is recognised that many learners for whom information is recorded in this field will not be able to identify themselves as having learning difficulties. This information will be recorded as a result of interviews with learners, their parents, guardians, teachers or advocates.</li><li>This field should be completed for all learners with learning difficulties not just those for whom additional support is provided.</li></ul>	Error



## Appendix 2: National Qualifications Framework

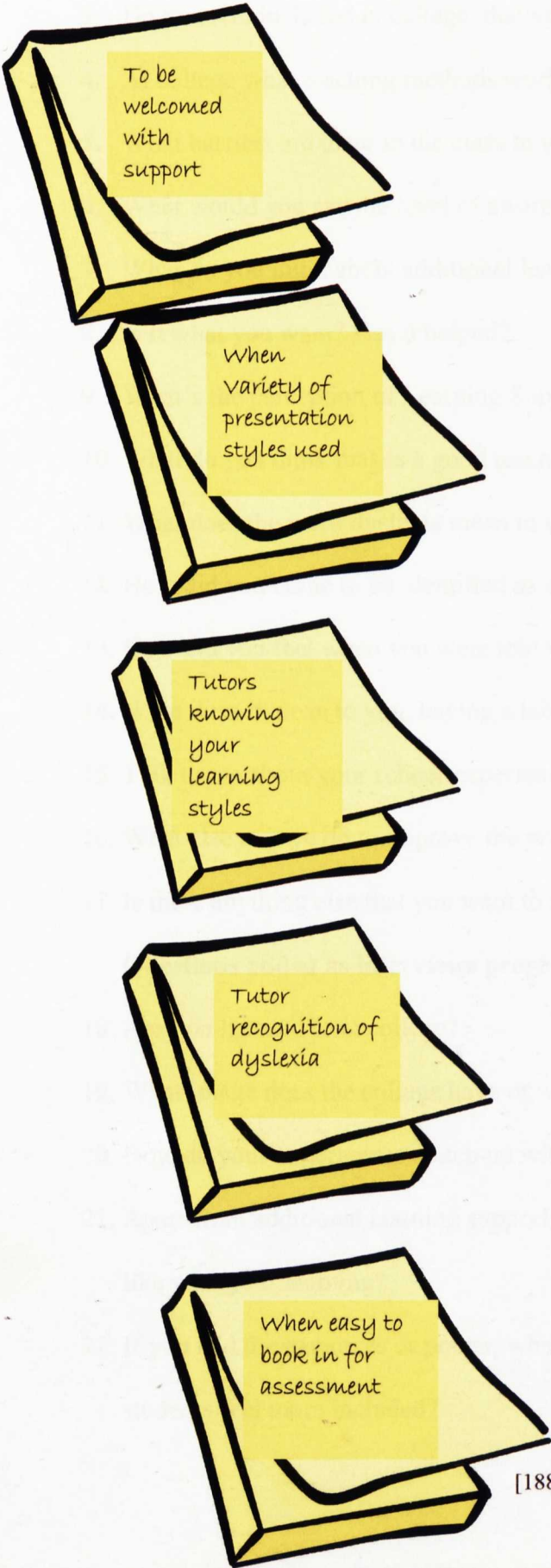
<b>National Qualifications Framework combining QCA and QAA (revised Jan 07)</b>	<b>General/academic subjects</b>	<b>Vocationally related oriented towards a vocation/ profession or trade</b>	<b>Occupational directly applicable to gaining or developing in work</b>
<b>8 D</b> (doctorate) level	Doctorates	Doctorates	Doctorates in professional Practice and by Public Works Level 5 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
<b>7 M</b> (masters) level	Master degree, Postgraduate certificates & postgraduate diplomas	Master degree, Postgraduate certificates & postgraduate diplomas, graduate apprenticeships  Key skills	Master of Professional Practice (WBL) Level 5 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
<b>6 H</b> (honours) level	Bachelors degrees with Honours, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas	Bachelors degrees with Honours, graduate certificates Higher and graduate diplomas Key skills	Level 4 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
<b>5 I</b> (Intermediate) level	Ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas	Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas Key skills	Level 4 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
<b>4 C</b> (certificate) level	Certificates of Higher Education	Certificates of Higher Education  Key skills	Level 4 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
<b>3</b> advanced level	A and AS levels, key skills or functional skills	Vocational A levels Various vocational diplomas and awards eg BTEC Nationals Specialised Diplomas  Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills	Level 3 NVQ  Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills
<b>2</b> intermediate level	GCSE grade A*-C	Foundation GNVQ Various vocational Certificates and awards Specialised Diplomas Vocational GCSE (grade A*-C) Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills Functional skills	Level 2 NVQ
<b>1</b> foundation level	GCSE grade D-G	Vocational GCSE grade D-G Specialised Diplomas	Level 1 NVQ
<b>Entry level</b>	Cert of educational achievement		

[www.actiononaccess.org/download.php?f=640](http://www.actiononaccess.org/download.php?f=640)

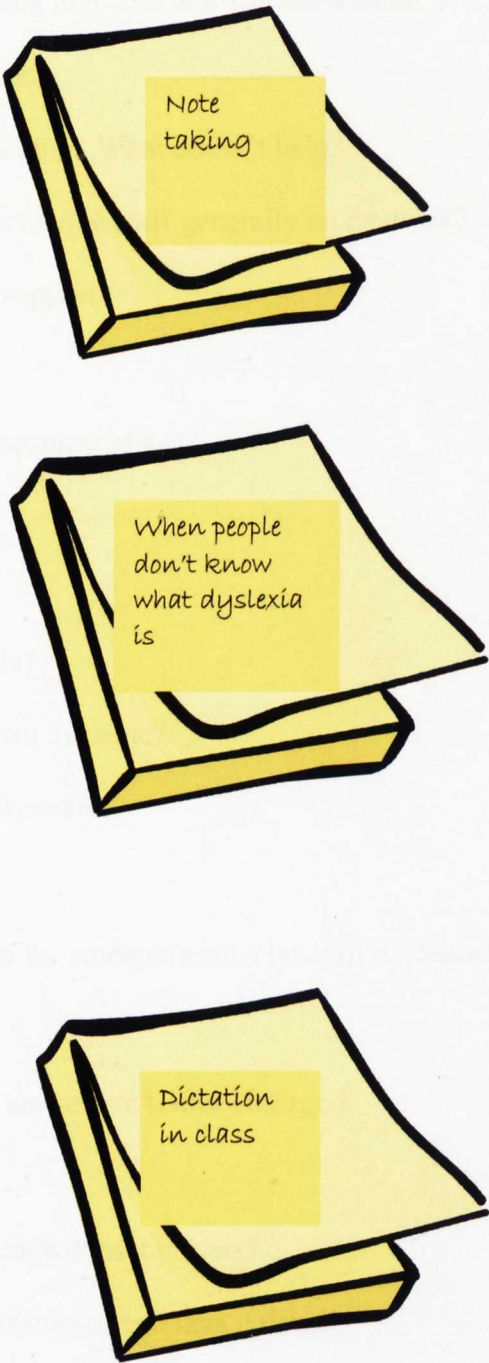


**Appendix 3:** Responses to question to focus group ‘What makes you feel included or excluded at college?’

**Included**



**Excluded**



#### **Appendix 4: Interview questions for students**

1. What course are you on, what subjects are you studying?
2. Tell me about your experiences at college.
3. Do you feel included in college, that you belong here and that you are wanted here?
4. At college what teaching methods work for you?
5. What barriers are there in the class to you learning? What doesn't help?
6. What would you say the level of awareness is among staff generally on dyslexia?
7. What do you think about additional learning support?
8. Is it what you want? Has it helped?
9. What's the perception of Learning Support among students?
10. What do you think makes a good teacher?
11. What does the word dyslexia mean to you?
12. How did you come to be identified as dyslexic?
13. How did you feel when you were told you were dyslexic?
14. What does it mean to you, having a label of dyslexia?
15. Talk to me about your school experiences.
16. What else can we do to improve the provision for students with a label of dyslexia?
17. Is there anything else that you want to say?

#### **Questions added as interviews progressed and other issues emerged**

18. Are you listened to at college?
19. What image does the college have or what image does it project?
20. How do your experiences match up with what the college says it does?
21. Apart from additional learning support, what other support do you get or would you like with your learning?
22. If you had the resources or power, what would you change in college to help students feel more included?

## **Appendix 5: Interview questions for tutors**

1. What do you teach? On what programme area? How did you come to teach in FE?
2. How well equipped to you feel to deal with the diversity of students in the classroom?
3. What is the culture of the college?
4. What are the current issues or difficulties for you as a tutor in FE?
5. What status do you feel you have in your role at college?
6. Are you listened to? Are your concerns addressed?
7. What is your perception of the A level programme/the vocational programme? Is there parity of esteem?
8. Do you think the college is inclusive of all students?
9. What is your understanding of dyslexia?
10. What do you think is the level of awareness in your department on teaching students with a label of dyslexia?
11. What do you think they struggle with in the classroom?
12. What do you see is the role of classroom assistants?
13. What do you know about or see as the role of Learning Support?
14. Did you/do you make any adjustments to your teaching? Please give examples.
15. How confident do you feel about teaching students with a label of dyslexia?
16. Do you know what is meant by the term 'reasonable adjustments'?
17. What reasonable adjustments do you think could be made in the classroom?
18. Have you ever attended a dyslexia awareness training course?
19. What do you feel about the level of training that is available at college?
20. Do you feel you need additional training on supporting students?
21. How important do you personally feel it is to know about the issues surrounding students with dyslexia?

22. Who, in your opinion, is responsible for supporting students with a label of dyslexia at college?
23. Do you think the college has a welcoming and including approach to students with a label of dyslexia?
24. How much autonomy do you have in your role?
25. Is there anything else you would like to say?

## **Appendix 6: Interview questions for managers**

1. Can we begin by you telling me how long you have worked at the college and your current role?
2. What does your role entail – what are your priorities?
3. How did you get into FE teaching?
4. What do you think is meant by inclusion at college?
5. How inclusive do you think we are at this college regarding students labelled as dyslexic?
6. How do you view the role of learning support at college?
7. What are your views on classroom assistants?
8. What is the management structure here and what are your views on it?
9. How effective are the communication systems?
10. What is the level of awareness about policy amongst staff?
11. What is the level of awareness about dyslexia amongst staff?
12. Are there any issues in terms of responding to diverse learners' requirements?
13. How much autonomy do you have in your role?
14. What are your views on CPD regarding dyslexia at college?
15. These are some of the issues that students I have interviewed have raised. What is your view?

## **Appendix 7: Interview questions for classroom assistants**

1. In what subject areas do you support?
2. What do you think is meant by the word ‘**dyslexia**’?
3. What do you think is meant by the word ‘**inclusion**’?
4. How inclusive do you think this college is? In what ways?
5. What are the main ways in which you support students with a label of dyslexia?
6. Do you feel you have received adequate training in supporting students with a label of dyslexia?
7. How does your role in class differ from the role of the tutor?
8. Do you think the roles of teacher and classroom assistant are clearly defined and understood?
9. What issues have you encountered in the classroom regarding supporting students with a label of dyslexia?
10. In your opinion, what barriers to learning exist at college for students with a label of dyslexia?
11. Can you give me any examples of good practice that have taken place in class?
12. How can the college move forward in promoting the inclusion of students with a label of dyslexia?
13. Have you anything else you wish to say?

**Appendix 8: Questionnaire to classroom assistants**

Please circle:                    **MALE**                    **FEMALE**

Age:                    **18-25**                    **26-35**                    **36-45**                    **46-55**                    **Over 55**

Programme area(s) you support in: **A level**                    **Vocational**                    **16-19**                    **Adult P/T**                    **Adult F/T**

How long have you worked here? **Less than a year**    **12-24 months**    **More than 2 years**

\*\*\*\*\*

- 1. What do you think is meant by the word ‘**dyslexia**’?
- 2. What do you think is meant by the word ‘**inclusion**’?
- 3. What are the main ways in which you support students with dyslexia?
- 4. How confident do you feel about supporting students with dyslexia?  
**Very confident                    reasonably confident                    unsure                    not confident at all**
- 5. Do you feel you have received adequate training in dealing with students with dyslexia? **YES                    NO**
- 6. How does your role in class differ from the role of the tutor?
- 7. Do you think the roles of teacher and ESW are clearly defined and understood?
- 8. Does your advice ever contradict that of the teacher?                    **Please give examples.**
- 9. Would you describe the college as inclusive with regard to students with dyslexia?  
**YES NO                    Please give your reasons.**

10. Do you think the college promotes itself as inclusive?

**YES NO      Please give your reasons.**

11. What issues have you encountered in the classroom regarding teaching students with dyslexia?

12. How often are you required to help the students by completing the tasks for them?

**All the time      very often      sometimes      rarely      never**

13. In your opinion, what barriers to learning exist at college for students with dyslexia?

14. What examples of good practice have you observed in class? **Please list.**

15. In your opinion what are the most effective strategies for supporting students with dyslexia?

16. Overall, how would you rate the **teaching** of students with dyslexia at this college?

**Excellent      very good      adequate      poor      unsure**

17. Overall, how would you rate the **support** for students with dyslexia at this college?

**Excellent      very good      adequate      poor      unsure**

18. How can the college move forward in promoting the inclusion of students with dyslexia?

19. Please add any other comments you wish to make

Many thanks for your time and cooperation. It is much appreciated.



# Appendix 9: Example of analysis of documentation

XX College		
POLICY TITLE: Equality and Diversity Policy		
APPROVED BY: Governing Body	AUTHOR: DH	
POLICY OWNER: Equality and Diversity Committee	POSITION: Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator	VERSION: 1
LAST UP-DATED: December 2008	REVIEW DATE: December 2011	
IMPACT ASSESSMENT DATE: May 2008		

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 It is the responsibility of every learner and member of staff[A1] to make sure they do not unfairly discriminate in any way. Each has a duty[A2] to uphold this Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 1.2 All job applicants, staff and learners will be informed of the college's commitment to equality and valuing diversity and we will make our Equality and Diversity Policy available on request.
- 1.3 The Equality and Diversity policy will be reviewed annually[A3] by the Equality and Diversity Committee which will meet at least once a term.

## 2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy describes college policy on equality and diversity in relation to marketing, publicity and school liaison, access and environment, curriculum, staffing, including recruitment and selection, professional development and harassment[m4].
- 2.2 Other related policies include the Race Equality Policy, Disability Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Family Friendly Policy, Maternity and Flexible Working Policies[A5]

## 3 Purpose

3.1 XX College recognises that many individuals and communities experience unlawful and unfair discrimination and disadvantage on the grounds of their race or ethnic origin, disability, gender or gender identity, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, offending background, socio-economic group etc. We believe that equality for all is a basic human right[A6] and actively oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. We value and celebrate the diversity in our society and are striving to promote and reflect that diversity[A7] within this College.

Comment [A1]	Ann-Marie
Collective responsibility.	
Comment [A2]	Ann-Marie
What kind of duty? Legal duty? Not explicit	
Comment [A3]	Ann-Marie
Regularly updated?	
Comment [m4]	mcna01
In relation to students?	
Comment [A5]	Ann-Marie
Web of policies. Where does Disability Statement or Learning Support policy fit in? Is there a coherent approach to policy making or is it piecemeal?	
Comment [A6]	Ann-Marie
Rights discourse	
Comment [A7]	Ann-Marie
Proactive - social model	

## **Appendix 10: Extracts from transcripts**

### **Focus Group and teaching and learning styles**

**D** ‘...I know in most of my classes there’s not many ways the teacher teaches...’

**Sa:** ‘What I’ve found in most of mine is that they’ve said – they’ve given us the test - I know this can’t apply to everything - they’ve said you can draw it, write it, make a song about it, you can do it which way you find best to do it, when we’ve had to go and do it ourselves – not in class - but she’s given us a variety of options of how to do it.’

**B:** ‘I find that sometimes the physics teacher just dictates notes and I find myself falling behind what she’s saying and I sometimes read my neighbour’s work to copy it out.’

**A:** ‘I find my physics teacher does as you said, writes on the board...’

**H:** a lot of my classes the notes are dictated. That’s no good – I can either look at something – I don’t like doing both – I can do one or the other.’

**St:** ‘This is why I dropped A levels. I used to take all the notes off my mates. I might only get half way through a full hour and a half lesson, take the notes, photocopy them and give them back, and I’d copy them up. It’s the only way I would actually learn anything from 3 out of 4 of my classes. Only psychology would give me extra notes or a bit of extra time to jot down the notes what I needed.’

**Sa:** ‘When they write it out on the whiteboard without reading it out I really struggle, but if they write it out while they’re reading it I manage much better – it goes in, and I can see it.’

**Sa:** A good idea is both my psychology and law put it on WEB CT so if we do miss anything, it’s on there.

**D:** None of my subjects are on WEB CT.

## Student interviews and teaching and learning styles

### SARA

*'I think knowing how somebody works is important, you know, knowing how dyslexic people work, for instance one time I'd got in front of my file I had some things I'd done in a spider, and they were just spiders which I'd put words down because that was a strategy somebody said have you tried to write a spider and I write certain words down and I've had all these papers in the front of my file and they might not have meant anything to her but they meant something to me and it was something I kept in there and they were reminders and I'd highlight them and I knew then next time I went to my file I had to...She'd said to me on one occasion, 'This file's for your NVQ'. She said 'I don't want to see all that stuff in your file, I'll give you an extra file'. Well, to me, you know, that was like, that's my file, this is my personal thing, and she didn't understand that these papers are so important to me, you know, being at the front, and they were there for a reason. And she actually came and gave me a file and to me I felt, although she was good at what she was doing, I felt, you know, she doesn't realise how important this is to me...' (Sara, adult student)*

### CAROLYN

*'Well, like I said, I took Politics in the first year, and I did very badly at Politics. And I think, I don't know if it was my dyslexia or it's just other things, but the teacher wasn't particularly helpful. He just sort of stood at the front of the class and talked. Not really talked about the subject, he just gave a very, very lot of reading to do. Like ridiculous amounts of reading. And, I mean, I know there'll be a lot of reading at university, but, honestly, nobody could have physically read everything that he gave us, and even if you did, you would only have been able to have read it once. And obviously for me, I've got to read something three or four times before I begin to understand it, and it got to the point where you just gave up because you just had a pile of stuff to read and it would just, would*

*have taken me years to read it all. And he didn't seem to be willing to sort of filter through and give you the most important things...' (Carolyn, A level student)*

### **NIGEL**

*'Well, it's like, when I didn't get work in on time I just used to get like, told off, but they didn't understand that it wasn't because I wasn't trying to do it, it's just that it takes me longer than it takes, say, somebody else...'*

*'I'm not good at typing. And that was another thing that media didn't pick up on. They said, 'You just need to type faster' and I said, I can't, I can't type with more than one hand, you know what I mean. They didn't say, 'Right, we'll get someone', because they could have arranged - I didn't need to go through you - they could have just rung direct to say I needed someone to help with computer lessons but they didn't.'*

*'But after they've explained something, if they can tell or if they think someone's struggling, instead of sitting there at the desk looking like they're marking something, drinking coffee, they should go round and say...because they're not paid to sit there and do nothing. They're paid to help you - that's what their job is, but...*

*I think it's more one to one or if, like, someone needs something explaining differently, or going through specific things. But they don't. It's more like, helping people, one to one or like...and in a way, them being teachers, they should know how different people learn, they should be observing you as well as... because that's part of the job, isn't it, observing and seeing what they're doing, but they didn't seem to do any of that'*

**(Nigel, Level 3 vocational student)**

### **DEBRA**

*'...if I'm asked to read something, especially out loud, I do stutter on my words and I find it very very difficult to read out loud, and I read very slow as well, which is quite annoying. If someone asks me to spell a word as well, it's like, I don't know how to spell that word*

*even though I'm trying, and stuff like that. Yeah. Especially reading off the board as well, if we have to write things down, that's difficult because then they just change the slide over and I haven't got all the work. I've got to copy of my mate and then she misses her work as well, so yeah...*

*'That's difficult because they read fast and there's a lot of difficult words, you know, erm. Some I can spell and some I can't, you know. If they did it on the board then it would be a lot easier for everybody. Because a lot of people there won't put their hand up to say, 'How do you spell this word?'* (Debra, Level 3 vocational student)

### **PHOEBE**

*'Then I went for advanced (course) in my Health and Social Care and one of my tutors – I can't say it was a bad, bad experience, it wasn't, but there was things they could have done, I was excluded. Rather than sit with me and try and make me understand at my level, they'd rather go with the majority of the class and give me an assignment that someone had done from years ago, and say – you can reword that into your own words. Apart from one tutor – she stopped and she invested the time in me and went through each bit once I did a paragraph I'd get her to check it - is it right? Am I on the right lines? Sometimes I think that's all it is you need – the reassurance, because of previous experiences, well, I always think I'm going wrong, because of how I was treated at school. But this one tutor who spent time with me, I passed hers, I got a B in all of her work, but in the other modules I didn't, I came out a lot lower, and they couldn't understand why I could come out so high on one of my courses but so low in the other ones, but it was because that tutor could be bothered to invest the time in me.'* (Phoebe, adult student)

## **NAOMI**

*'Mainly just slower at writing and it takes forever to understand something. Someone can't just explain it a different way. And getting used to teaching styles takes about 6 months! Then I get used to it and I'm OK (LAUGHS).*

**Right. So what kind of teaching styles have you had to get used to?**

*Erm, just not being able to explain something a different way, so I have to work out what they mean and then interpret it myself and then come back to them and say, is this what you mean? And it takes up loads of time to do it.*

**So have you said to tutors, I don't understand the way you're explaining it?**

*Yeah, and sometimes they're like, erm, yeah, well, I don't know how to do it, and they just don't have a clue how to do it a different way. Oh, just give me a book or something, and I'll just interpret it my way!' (Naomi, A Level student)*

## **LEON**

*'They should have the choice of if they want to listen to music, then they can. Erm, be involved, don't actually be isolated from the rest of the class because then you're actually making us feel like we're special and we're like different than everybody else. So if you let us sit where we want, with our friends, then yeah, OK, if we get distracted, then a quick jog, yeah, come on, let's get on with your work, then if you've got your music put your headphones in, then you get on with your work.' (Leon, Level 3 vocational student)*

## **MIKE**

*'I don't feel included when we have to be in front of the class doing Power Points. I hate it. If I could read the Power Points I'd be first up there. And menus. Also sometimes when someone tells me, 'Read this'.' (Mike, Level 2 vocational student)*



## Appendix 11: Example of annotation and coding. Transcript of interview with Leah

Colour codes: past experiences support teaching and learning labelling discourses

Transcript of interview with Leah

**Tell me what course you are on?**

I'm doing A levels.

**When were you informed you were dyslexic? How did that come about?**

March last year. I've always struggled with English and<sup>[A1]</sup> at GCSE I got all As and Bs apart from English and French. I got A for my French speaking and B for my French listening and reading and that went down to a C for my French writing. I fared really badly on that! And the same for my English. If we had coursework I could...you know if we had a few days to kind of get what I wanted to put together on paper it was fine, my coursework normally came out as a B, but in the exam I came out with a C. It<sup>[A2]</sup> was hard to get everything down.

When<sup>[A3]</sup> I came to this college I asked to be tested. My<sup>[A4]</sup> mum's dyslexic and she only got assessed when she was in work when someone said to her, 'have you ever thought about being tested' and<sup>[A5]</sup> it was something I asked for when I came to this college. I officially got<sup>[A6]</sup> the last test<sup>[A7]</sup> done in March last year and yeah. My only problem with that was, my January exams I didn't get anything, any extra time for, which meant I had to...I did really badly in<sup>[A8]</sup> them so I did them all again in June.

**So did you find then that the extra time helped you a lot?**

Yes, I got a D in law in January and an A in June, so being able to have the extra time for me, especially in law – I'm doing law, biology and chemistry, and in law it's been really helpful, because there's so much to write. <sup>[A9]</sup>

**How did you feel, then, when you were informed that you were dyslexic?**

Erm, happy, because<sup>[A10]</sup> if it's there, I've got it anyway, it's not like you telling me makes it worse, it's already there and at least then you can start to do something about it, but<sup>[A11]</sup> at the same time a bit like 'Oh', because it is a...I mean I've seen the t-shirts that people go round with – they have t-shirts with funny slogans that say 'Dyslexics of the world untie' and there is that stigma of, 'you're stupid' with it. And<sup>[A12]</sup> my job application for a part time job said, 'Do you have any mental disabilities?' and<sup>[A13]</sup> that kind of thing and it's just something that would always be there. So it was just a...now that I know that I have to officially declare it, kind of stuff, it's a bit of a stigma<sup>[A14]</sup>.

**So what barriers are you experiencing then at college? What are the issues for you?**

Erm, teachers. One<sup>[A15]</sup> in particular, but I won't name names. Constantly dictating. I had this teacher last year as well and I've asked him several times, 'Could you slow down, could you stop' but he just carries on dictating and that's absolutely awful. <sup>[A16]</sup> get to the point where I'm copying off my friend's notes or borrowing books to try and copy up the notes, which isn't fair on my friends to sort of say, 'Can I borrow your book overnight?'



## Annotation

Comments in **black font** were initial thoughts and ideas on first reading/transcribing.  
Surface analysis as linked to initial ideas.

**Red font:** comments added on further analysis.

<b>Comment [A1]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Literacy an issue	
<b>Comment [A2]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Coursework easier than exams ENHANCE	
<b>Comment [A3]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Exams difficult - getting all information down. INHIBIT	
<b>Comment [A4]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Sought assessment – had to be proactive.	
<b>Comment [A5]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Deficit view/discourse	
<b>Comment [A6]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
'Official' discourse Power of assessment process	
<b>Comment [A7]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Deficit	
<b>Comment [A8]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Implies that didn't do well in exams due to not getting extra time INHIBIT	
<b>Comment [A9]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Extra time really helped in exams. Getting reasonable adjustments ENHANCE.	
<b>Comment [A10]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Felt happy when identified dyslexic	
<b>Comment [A11]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Label enables her to do something about it – support? Label positive when leads to help?	
<b>Comment [A12]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
But also ambivalent towards dyslexia label (see above)	
<b>Comment [A13]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Deficit discourse	
<b>Comment [A14]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Stigma and associated with 'stupid'	
<b>Comment [A15]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Teacher is barrier to learning in method of delivery – dictation INHIBIT	
<b>Comment [A16]</b>	<b>Ann-Marie</b>
Tension with teacher – asked him several times to slow down but carries on. Not listened to – power relationships. Silencing of voice	



## Appendix 12: Example of combing for commonalities and differences

### CATEGORY: LABELLING

#### Code: Reaction to label

#### Transcriptions

#### POSITIVE

'I was like **relieved**, because I thought, if I wasn't, I thought, oh God, I really am **stupid**' (Ryan)

'I was **relieved**. I went away and I didn't feel despondent or anything, I felt like I'd won the lottery. I wasn't **thick**, I was dyslexic, and it was just a great weight off my shoulders' (Sara)

'It was quite a **relief**- that's the only way I can say it, to actually know what it is' (Naomi)

'when I got it all through I was **really chuffed** because I finally realised I wasn't just **thick**' (Nigel).

'Me, being told officially, I couldn't give two hoots, I **wasn't bothered**, there was nothing I could do about it, being dyslexic, so I wasn't bothered' (Phoebe)

#### NEGATIVE

'I felt quite **upset** at the time, but I just laughed it off really, especially finding out I had short-term memory loss as well, which...that got me down' (Debra)

Sara	Ryan	Phoebe	Nigel	Naomi	Leon	Leah	Debra	Mike
<b>Relief</b> - Positive reaction to dyslexia label to replace 'thick'. Reframed	<b>relief</b> Reframed 'stupid' label Positive about dyslexia now getting support	Assessment 'officially' confirmed. <b>Not bothered</b> about label. Doesn't affect her until barriers encountered.	<b>Really chuffed</b> - not 'thick'. Reframed into 'I learn a different way'.	<b>Relief</b> when assessed to know what it is. Family has it so 'fits in'	Having a label means he gets more help.	<b>Happy</b> when told she was dyslexic because then you can start to do something about it Ambivalent because there's the stigma of 'you're stupid' with it.	<b>Upset</b> when informed she was dyslexic.  Not aware she 'had memory problems'	

#### Analysis:

Mostly positive. One negative reaction

Word relief used a few times.

Label of 'dyslexia' a relief when seen as replacement for label of 'stupid', 'thick'.

Also positive when associated with receiving support

Negative when highlighted individual 'deficit' previously unaware of.

Ambivalence: on one hand leads to doing something about it, but on other hand, stigma attached. Not always a replacement label for 'stupid', but can be associated with label.

#### Link to previous experiences

Leah considered herself 'clever' before receiving label. Other students felt 'thick' or 'stupid'.

Reaction to label influenced by previous experiences and self image. Has an effect on self perception. Also affected by opportunity for support.

### Appendix 13: Annotated, coded excerpt of transcript of interview with Nigel

#### CODING:

Green highlighting: past experiences

Yellow highlighting: support

Pink highlighting: teaching and learning

Blue highlighting: labelling issues

Grey highlighting: discourses

#### ANNOTATION:

Comments in **black font** were initial thoughts and ideas on first reading/transcribing.

Surface analysis as linked to initial ideas.

**Red font:** comments added on further analysis.

Green font: my reactions to data.

**Tell me about your experiences at college. Did you come into college without having been identified as dyslexic?**

Yes, and as soon as I started, I started struggling, but I thought because I'd always struggled through school and everything like that, I thought it was part and parcel of it. So I just carried on and I was really falling behind. I was really trying but I couldn't seem to get anywhere at all because it was going over my head. It was too technical and there was no support. Then they started bringing me in on my study day, but not even, like, being nice about it, just 'You're coming in' and I was like, 'Right'. Then they made me sign this thing and said they'd give me a first stage warning if I didn't do it. So I started coming in and they'd put me in a room for 3 hours solid and told me to do work, but if you can't do the work in the first place you're not going to be able to do it. So I carried on doing that but nothing happened. I wasn't getting it done because I couldn't do it and then when the contract came to be renewed I said I don't want to go back – I need some more help; it's not working. But they practically forced me to do it. They literally said I'd get a second stage warning if I didn't comply with it or they'd maybe think about kicking me out, so I



didn't have much choice. So I went back again and then I finally...I don't know how I managed to get assessed, but I got an assessment which was really good because the people in learning support are different to those in media. You understand it and you could tell I wasn't being bad and refusing to do my work. So then I got my assessment and when I got it all through I was really chuffed because I finally realised I wasn't just thick. I learn in a different way. Then I started coming to learning support for different things to do with getting my work organised which was very hard for me then and I came to do some stuff with my maths when I was resitting my GCSE and that was one of the reasons I managed to pass it otherwise I wouldn't have had a chance of doing that. The I started doing time management and that was really helpful because it gave me a chance to get all my work done and still have a bit of a social life, which is important. So that really helped. Then I got Kiera who did all my typing for me which was really helpful, because that's what I struggle with. I'm one of these one fingered typists. Yes, they still exist! That helped me get all my work actually done. But there was still no support in media. You know, with my dyslexia, I was just, you know, brushed to the side, with all the ones who weren't doing so well, and you know, like school, they only concentrated on the ones who were going to leave with the best marks because it looks good in the brochure for the people who are coming the year after. In the last few weeks I got my spreadsheet through and I was like, it was not really good, but then I thought, I'm going to really, really work, because more than anything I wanted to prove them wrong, that actually I could do summat, that I could actually achieve better than they thought I was going to do. Which I did, I left with the equivalent of 2 As and a B, which is better than...they thought I wasn't going to leave with anything. But it was all mainly learning support because without them I couldn't have done it and without that assessment I don't think I would have completed the 2 years. I think I would have completed only the first one, and it would have been life at Tesco for me.

**You mentioned the tutors and their expectations of you. What did you think they were expecting from you?**

Well, I think they just thought I was being lazy and that I wasn't applying myself. Obviously they could see my GCSE results and think I did all right in English because I was good at English. That's the only thing I could do at school – anything English based I was all right, and drama, because it was practical. But if it's like science or maths, anything a bit more confusing, anything a bit more like technical I can't do it. I probably shouldn't have done media really, but I thought, no. Originally I thought I wanted to be a journalist, but then I actually got told I didn't have the attention span to do that. So that's one of the reasons why I haven't applied to uni this year because I got told that. Being that one of the only things I was ever good at was English, I thought, I'll have to have a stab at that, because I really wanted to do something in that like area. This is going to sound really, really sad, but I wanted to write for the Sun, because I don't read the Times, the Observer or the Independent, I thought, well, I do read that, I buy it all the time. I know it's probably all fairy tales and story books, but it's more in...you know what I mean, because it's quite easy to read. I really wanted to do something like that, you know, that people like me read, and I got told that I wouldn't have the attention span to do broadcast journalism, but then I got told to go and do something to do with performance and I said to her, 'I don't want to be an actor'. Then when it came down to a few months ago when I was applying, they were trying to say, 'Go on then, go and do it' and I thought, no, I'm not going to do a course that they want me to do because I don't want to do it myself. I'd rather wait. So I'll see what I get at the end. So I think next year I'm going to do that.

**Another thing you mentioned before was that you felt you were sidelined in class. Can you give me some examples of that?**



Well, it's like, when I didn't get work in on time I just used to get like, told off, but they didn't understand that it wasn't because I wasn't trying to do it, it's just that it takes me longer than it takes, say, somebody else. And then when I'm struggling with something, instead of like saying, 'Do you need help with this?' it would be just like, spend longer on it and they'd leave me. There was no actual support until near the end. I had a few meetings and I kept mentioning my dyslexia/dyspraxia, but it was like it didn't exist, it was like they didn't know about it, but they did. Then they'd say, 'Oh yes, we know about it' but there was no support put in place in media itself to actually help me and help the other people in the class with dyslexia. You were just expected to get on with it. They kept like, 'You've got this good grade; everyone passes,' but then people are only passing because literally you're signing them out with something really bad that's still a pass rate, or, when everyone else has finished, they'd keep you there, literally lock you in a room and just tell you to do your work until you're done. And they even said, I remember them saying to us that once, after the nineteenth, when we're all supposed to officially leave, if anybody was still there, there wouldn't be classes for them, because they didn't have to teach you anymore. You'd literally just be put in a room and just go and send your work in to be marked. I mean, I've got friends who are actually still there. They don't actually have the support that they need to do certain things. I was lucky that in the end I managed to teach myself how to use a camera, how to use an edit suite. I know we have been told, but we haven't actually been taught. When somebody gives you a demonstration at the front of the class, especially in the first year, the video teacher, he tried to be more like, your best friend, more one of you than an actual teacher. That's something you need when you first come to college. Then after the first year he left, and a lot of people's work got lost, because obviously he'd taken work with him or whatever. Then they were saying like, 'We can't mark that, it's his work', but someone has to mark it because...unless they get it back from where he lives.

Learning support was really good because they managed to get me back on track. When I passed my maths GCSE that was something, because I thought, well, I failed that at school and I've passed that now, so I might have a cat in hell's chance of passing this. Then for the last few weeks, Kiera was really good because she sat me down and she was like, 'What are we going to do? Would you like to do these three things?' I'd speak, she'd type, and yeah, we got it all done. I was quite chuffed when I got my marks for editing and my filming, because they're my weakest areas. Now, on paper, they're my strongest areas which is really weird, because I'd never have expected that, but no, I'm really chuffed.

**So, if you could change things, what would you change about the teaching then?**

I don't know, this is going to sound really bad but I'd keep one or two of them but I'd get some new people in, because they don't seem to have any motivation. You can tell it's like, they seem to do it more like it's a job than an actual vocation which is what teaching's meant to be. Sometimes they need to cut me a bit of slack sometimes and maybe be a bit harder on you other times. But it seems to be a bit too much like, you go to your lessons and there's this and this objective and you'll do that. But there was no actual real interaction.



## Annotation

<b>Comment [A1]</b>	Accepted his struggling
<b>Comment [A2]</b>	Too technical and not supported. INHIBIT
<b>Comment [A3]</b>	Not negotiated. Student not asked. Power relations.
<b>Comment [A4]</b>	Control of his behaviour through threat of a warning. Control and punishment
<b>Comment [A5]</b>	Told to work but without support. INHIBIT Not taught
<b>Comment [A6]</b>	Tried to explain it wasn't helping but not listened to – 'forced' to come in on Study Day. No choice X ref - theme?
<b>Comment [A7]</b>	Student had no power and control. Support not negotiated.
<b>Comment [A8]</b>	Threat of exclusion from college if didn't comply Punishment, power, control - Foucault relevance?
<b>Comment [A9]</b>	Positive about assessment – was good because felt understood. Not being bad. Glad that assessment was important for his self image. Challenges my preconceived idea that students might not be happy about having assessment and label
<b>Comment [A10]</b>	'thick' is a term used by other students interviewed Deficit discourse
<b>Comment [A11]</b>	Assessment changed his perception of himself – reframed from 'thick'. ENHANCE Reinforces my belief that it is so important how it is explained to students
<b>Comment [A12]</b>	Learns in a different way
<b>Comment [A13]</b>	Organisation hard for him INHIBIT
<b>Comment [A14]</b>	Attributes passing maths to LS
<b>Comment [A15]</b>	Centralised support services helped him, but there was no support from course tutors in classroom. Additional support not enough. Wanted help from tutors. X-ref with other students' accounts  Is he saying what he thinks I want to hear about LS? But making me think - is LS what the student wanted, or is it because he is not getting the tutor support in classroom that is perceived as so good?
<b>Comment [A16]</b>	Brushed to side with others not doing well. Exclusion. INHIBIT
<b>Comment [A17]</b>	Focus on results INHIBIT Focus on high grades Not aware of this! Have I been in a bubble?
<b>Comment [A18]</b>	Focus on high achievers for marketing purposes! surprised at this and at awareness of student of this Business model effects
<b>Comment [A19]</b>	Reality different to published materials - rhetoric INHIBIT X- ref - theme in student accounts
<b>Comment [A20]</b>	Low expectations of him from tutors made him more determined. Expectations INHIBIT
<b>Comment [A21]</b>	Wanted to prove them wrong. Didn't agree with their perceptions of him.
<b>Comment [A22]</b>	He felt learning support enabled him to complete his course with good grades. ENHANCE
<b>Comment [A23]</b>	Achieving good grades increased his life chances. Saw his life with a job in a supermarket without high grades.
<b>Comment [A24]</b>	Teachers perceived him as lazy LABELLING
<b>Comment [A25]</b>	Good at English
<b>Comment [A26]</b>	Good at practical subjects but finds 'technical' subjects hard. PRACTICAL SKILLS
<b>Comment [A27]</b>	Negative comments influenced his applying to uni ATTITUDES INHIBIT



<b>Comment [A28]</b>	/
Pressure on him to apply for a uni course he wasn't interested in	
<b>Comment [A29]</b>	/
Tension between tutor and student regarding advice on career choices INHIBIT Not listened to	
<b>Comment [A30]</b>	/
Tutors didn't understand him missing deadlines – attributed to him not wanting to work ATTITUDES INHIBIT	
<b>Comment [A31]</b>	/
Takes him longer to complete work	
<b>Comment [A32]</b>	/
Tutors' response to him struggling was to leave him to spend longer on it rather than help. INHIBIT No teaching	
<b>Comment [A33]</b>	/
Wasn't acknowledged. He told them but was ignored. Not listened to	
<b>Comment [A34]</b>	/
Expected to work without support in class INHIBIT	
<b>Comment [A35]</b>	/
No help in class for him or others	
<b>Comment [A36]</b>	/
Signing work off at a pass level to get everyone to pass Target culture? Links to lit. Check with tutors	
<b>Comment [A37]</b>	/
See also ESW comments on everyone passing XREF	
<b>Comment [A38]</b>	/
If not up to standard 'locked' in a room until the work done. Punishment? Power?	
<b>Comment [A39]</b>	/
No class teaching after a certain date if not finished – left alone to submit work to just be marked. Lack of teaching	
<b>Comment [A40]</b>	/
Others in class not getting support they need	
<b>Comment [A41]</b>	/
See also Natalie's comments about her friends not feeling they have the support they need. Not just learners identified with LD XREF	
<b>Comment [A42]</b>	A
Taught himself some skills	
<b>Comment [A43]</b>	A
Quality of teaching? Feels not being taught	
<b>Comment [A44]</b>	A
Relationship between tutor and student in class important – friendly approach helped rather than student/teacher relationship ENHANCE Breaking down relations helps	
<b>Comment [A45]</b>	A
LS got him back on track. Valued.	
<b>Comment [A46]</b>	A
Some success bred a sense of belief	
<b>Comment [A47]</b>	A
Classroom assistant approach was to ask and involve him in decisions. ENHANCE Helps when listened to and participates in learning	
<b>Comment [A48]</b>	A
Marks attained didn't correspond with his perception of his skills.	
<b>Comment [A49]</b>	A
Teachers don't appear motivated. Check with tutors Surprised. Not the college rhetoric or espoused ethos	



## **Appendix 14: Summary of analysis of questionnaire responses**

Generally dyslexia was described with reference to literacy based skills and perceived as a problem or difficulty.

The main ways of supporting students were: note taking and explaining tasks. These accord with students' views on how the support worker helps them since these activities may not be provided by the tutor.

All respondents reported feeling confident or reasonably confident about supporting students labelled as dyslexic and all felt they had received adequate training.

Two respondents explained that their role differs from that of the tutor in that they work 1-1 with their student. Thus, they are not working with the whole class – are they therefore 'managing' the student? **This needs further investigation.**

All respondents felt that clarity of roles wasn't always understood by all – **this could be followed up in interviews.**

All respondents said they would describe the college as inclusive with regard to students labelled as dyslexic, two listing the fact that learning support provided them with the necessary support to be included. **This can be interpreted in a number of ways.** Are they telling me what I want to hear, since it is my overall responsibility to ensure that this happens? Do they also see the inclusion of students as the responsibility of the Learning Support Department, therefore not considering the classroom and college generally?

In the following question all list a range of situations encountered in the classroom that could be considered to be barriers to the inclusion of students. Interestingly when asked to list potential barriers to learning for students, all list factors that are located within an individual deficit model. It appears that, in this very small sample, the social model is not much in evidence, contrary to the advocated ethos and policies of the college.

Obviously it is not possible to generalise from the limited sample designed to pilot the questionnaire, and may not be representative of classroom assistants generally, but it has raised a number of issues that can be pursued probably more fruitfully with interviews.

## **Appendix 15: Informed consent**

**This information was supplied verbally to the participants and a written copy issued**

Thank you for agreeing to meet me. I am conducting some research as part of a Doctorate in Education course I am studying with the Open University. The focus of the research is on the experiences of students labelled as dyslexic in this college and their views on what makes them feel included or excluded. I am also interested in the views of teachers, classroom assistants and managers - what they have to say about processes of inclusion at college and their responses to the students' views.

The interview will take about an hour. I have some questions I would like to ask but I am interested in the things you feel are important to say on the subject. There are no right or wrong answers. I want to try to understand the issues as you experience them, so please feel free to say whatever you wish. Everything you say will be treated by me as completely confidential. I will be producing a written report which will contain quotes from the interviews, but these will be anonymous. Neither will I name the college. I will try, as far as possible, to ensure that no-one can be identified. I am happy for you to read the final draft of the report if you wish and you can tell me if there is anything you do not wish to be included. The report will be read by my supervisor and other staff at the Open University. If I achieve the Doctorate, a copy of the report may be made available in the public library. Extracts may also be used for journal articles.

I would like to record the interview, if you are happy with this, to ensure that I have an accurate record of what was said. I will then transcribe the interview word for word and delete the recording. The recorder and the transcripts will be kept securely in my possession. No-one else will have access to them and I will not release any information to anyone else.

Please do not feel obliged to take part. If you do agree, you may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the research.

## **Appendix 16: Phoebe's account of an incident in class**

*Last week I got a bit upset... We were doing basic decimals and I couldn't get why this decimal point would be moving. So I said to her, 'I don't understand', so she explained it again – still didn't get it. Then she put the basic numbers in words – it was then involved in a sentence, so I had then the problem of trying to read the sentences, also trying to ask what it's doing, so it's obviously taken twice as long, but the rest of class have finished it and I was still on the third question trying to read it.*

*...So when she came to mark it she said to me, 'You should be looking at this, Phoebe', in front of the whole class, and made me feel like a kid, and I'm not. So I got upset and thought, I'm not sitting in here and crying, so I went to the toilet and was really upset in the toilet. I came back in and I think because when I was at school as a child and when I was first here, initially, I couldn't say anything, because I was only 16, but now that I'm older, - I'm 23, I know that's wrong. Not only that, now I have the determination. You're the teacher and you're here to challenge the student. Well I'm a disabled student with a learning difficulty and I'm here to challenge you. So I went back in and spoke to her and she said, 'What happened?' I said, 'I didn't get it, I didn't understand', Then she said something, and I said, 'It's your teaching – you're teaching too fast, I can't keep up with you', and she said, 'I can't keep the rest of the class behind just because you don't get it. I can't say to them, 'Phoebe doesn't get it, so let's go over it again'. So that got my back up, and I think because I was that way out anyway, I was really rude, and I said to her, 'Well neither can you go on with the rest of the class and leave me behind, just because I don't get it. You need to teach me'. Then that was it, and she said, 'Well maybe we should get you some support in class and that was how she left it.' (Phoebe, adult student)*

## **Appendix 17: College Equality and Diversity Policy**

<b>POLICY TITLE:</b> Equality and Diversity Policy		
<b>APPROVED BY:</b> Governing Body	<b>AUTHOR:</b> xx	
<b>POLICY OWNER:</b> Equality and Diversity Committee	<b>POSITION:</b> Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator	<b>VERSION:</b> 1
<b>LAST UP-DATED:</b> December 2008	<b>REVIEW DATE:</b> December 2011	
<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT DATE:</b> May 2008		

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 It is the responsibility of every learner and member of staff to make sure they do not unfairly discriminate in any way. Each has a duty to uphold this Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 1.2 All job applicants, staff and learners will be informed of the college's commitment to equality and valuing diversity and we will make our Equality and Diversity Policy available on request.
- 1.3 The Equality and Diversity policy will be reviewed annually by the Equality and Diversity Committee which will meet at least once a term.

### **2 Scope**

- 2.1 This policy describes college policy on equality and diversity in relation to marketing, publicity and school liaison, access and environment, curriculum, staffing, including recruitment and selection, professional development and harassment.
- 2.2 Other related policies include the Race Equality Policy, Disability Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Family Friendly Policy, Maternity and Flexible Working Policies

### **3 Purpose**

3.1 XX College recognises that many individuals and communities experience unlawful and unfair discrimination and disadvantage on the grounds of their race or ethnic origin, disability, gender or gender identity, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, offending background, socio-economic group etc. We believe that equality for all is a basic human right and actively oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. We value and celebrate the diversity in our society and are striving to promote and reflect that diversity within this College.

### **4 Marketing, Publicity and School Liaison**

- 4.1 The College will research the needs of prospective learners in our partner schools and wider community and attempt to respond to those needs in terms of course provision and support.

- 4.2 The College will make publicity and marketing information available in a range of accessible formats for current and prospective learners. All publicity and information will take into account equal opportunities for staff and learners. Publicity materials will offer guidance on how to apply for financial assistance.
- 4.3 The College will liaise with partner schools, other colleges, Connexions and local agencies to promote its Equality and Diversity Policy and generate interest in its courses from people not currently attending college.
- 4.4. College publicity will aim to reflect our Equality and Diversity Policy and be free from bias and stereotypical images.

## **5 Access and Environment**

- 5.1 College staff will ensure advice is available to prospective and existing learners, without bias, on transport, courses, grants, benefits and careers.
- 5.2 Prospective learners will be advised of support available to them in the college.
- 5.3 All signs, regulations, communications and instructions will be as clear and simple as possible and free from discriminatory language.
- 5.4 The College will take into account the diverse needs of its community in its planning and will seek to provide a range of levels of courses and resources and varied modes of delivery.
- 5.5 Support will be provided to learners and reasonable adjustments will be made to enable them to be successful in their studies.
- 5.6 The College will allocate resources to reflect its commitment to managing equality and diversity.

## **6 Curriculum**

- 6.1 Guidance, assessment, support and counselling will be available to all learners to promote their opportunity to follow courses of their choice.
- 6.2 The College will endeavour to offer opportunities to all learners to study at a level appropriate to them.
- 6.3 The College will endeavour to ensure all teaching and curriculum materials are non-discriminatory and free from bias.
- 6.4 The College will endeavour to maximise progression opportunities including the accreditation of prior learning and experience.
- 6.5 The College will seek to play its part in meeting the needs of those seeking to return to study after a long period of unemployment, and/or domestic commitment, as well as those whose linguistic or cultural background, gender or other circumstances have made it difficult for them to benefit from education.
- 6.6 The Personal Tutor curriculum will enable learners to understand College values and the College's commitment to valuing diversity.

## **7 Staffing**

- 7.1 The College will ensure that fair and adequate arrangements exist for both effectively managing and recording all aspects of the employment relationship, including recruitment and selection.
- 7.2 Action will be taken to ensure that individuals are treated equally and fairly and that decisions on recruitment, selection, pay, training, development, promotion, career management and on the termination of employment are based solely on objective and job related criteria.

## **8 Professional Development and Training**

- 8.1 Managers involved in the recruitment and selection process will all be trained in legislative requirements.
- 8.2 Training on SENDA and roles and responsibilities in Equality and Diversity will be mandatory to all staff.
- 8.3 The Professional Development Policy will reflect the College's Equality Diversity Policy.
- 8.4 All teachers will be offered training to implement Equality and Diversity in the classroom.
- 8.5 Targets will be set for staff participation in training.

## **9 Harassment**

- 9.1 Everyone is entitled to be treated with courtesy and respect. The College will not accept behaviour towards people which is offensive, might threaten their security or create an intimidating or hostile environment which could hinder their performance and/or affect their personal well being.
- 9.2 All alleged incidents of harassment / bullying will be dealt with according to the College's harassment / bullying procedures and policies.

## **10 Monitoring and Review**

- 10.1 The operation of this policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Committee under the guidance of the Senior Management Team.
- 10.2 The Strategic Plan will:
  - a) address major equal opportunities initiatives for the coming year
  - b) set and report on Equality and Diversity Impact measures
- 10.3 The Equality and Diversity Committee will review progress against the Strategic Plan termly and ensure that the College:
  - a) reviews College procedures and publications for bias
  - b) offers appropriate professional development as required
  - c) promotes diversity appropriately
  - d) makes guidance available to staff and students on the operation of the Policy

- e) reports on complaints, bullying and grievances relating to issues relating to the Equality and Diversity Policy
- f) creates a profile of staff and learner populations indicating any areas of under representation and positive action strategies
- g) monitors information relating to staff recruitment, selection, promotion and training
- h) monitors student achievement data

10.4 There will be an annual report to staff, learners and governors on the operation of the Equality and Diversity Policy. The report is expected to address the following:

- a) summary of significant matters raised at the Equality and Diversity Committee and in staff and learner focus groups and surveys
- b) any recommendations or changes to the Equality and Diversity Policy
- c) a report on audits of physical access undertaken
- d) a statement of resources allocated to diversity management, including training
- e) any achievements in Diversity during the year.

## **11 General**

11.1 If any individual feels that they have been treated less favourably and not in accordance with this policy, they should report this via the College's Complaints or Grievance Procedure. In the first instance, matters may be discussed informally with either the College's Personnel Manager (staff) or the Student Services Manager (learners).



## **Appendix 18: College Disability Statement**

**W e l c o m e !**

A guide to extra help and facilities available for students with disabilities and additional needs.

XX College aims to meet the educational needs of the whole community. If you have a disability or learning difficulty you are therefore welcomed, and will be given support to achieve your learning potential.

We believe all students have the right to receive high quality relevant education at an appropriate level. Support will be provided which encourages independence and autonomy. This will be negotiated individually to ensure success and help students move on to other opportunities in education.

The support provided by the College will depend on a detailed assessment of your needs using information from you, your parents / carers (if appropriate) background information from careers services, Social Services, schools, etc. Every effort will be made by the College to meet your needs and you will be informed of the level of support that is planned for you.

Any information will be dealt with confidentially and only the educational implications of your disability will be passed on to teaching staff. With your permission. You will receive a copy of the form which contains this information. Depending on the assessment, this is what we provide:

- Assessments / access arrangements
- Classroom assistants
- Out of class support
- Extra help with Essential Skills (Maths, English, IT)
- Specialist equipment
- Communicators (BSL), note takers, brailled handouts, enlarged handouts
- Help with time management and organisation skills
- Individual programmes
- Starter/Entry courses
- Advice/support to course tutors
- 1:1 Monitoring sessions
- Pre-enrolment meeting

You need to contact the College as early as possible to arrange a meeting with the Learning Support Team to discuss the kind of support you need and to tour the College. We will listen to what you say and do our best to meet your needs. Telephone: xx, or email: xx  
Specialist staff

We have staff with a range of skills. Currently we are able to offer help with:

- Specific Learning Differences e.g. Dyslexia /Dyspraxia
- English, Maths and Study Skills
- General Learning Difficulties
- ADHD / Behavioural Problems
- Visual Impairment
- Deaf / Hearing Impairment
- Physical Difficulties
- Mental Health Difficulties
- Complex Learning Difficulties
- Autism, Asperger's Syndrome
- Health and Medical Problems

- Communicators

### Technology and Equipment

We have a range of equipment available:

- Laptop computers
- Digital Voice Recorders
- Loop systems
- Enlarged keyboards
- Large screen monitors
- Specialist software
- Pen drives
- Writing tablets

Equipment is allocated according to need as stated in the assessment.

### Support for Students on Higher Education Courses

Extra help is available for students on HE courses but is organised slightly differently.

Please contact the Learning Support Team for help with applying for a Disabled Student Award.

### Examinations & Assessment

When you attend the initial support interview you will be asked about your exam requirements and all full and part time students are asked during induction whether they need exam access arrangements.

You must make sure that the Learning Support Team knows about your requirements and you need to make an appointment in September to discuss your needs.

The examinations staff and Learning Support team work together to arrange the different access arrangements needed by individual students.

Access arrangements which may include:

- Extra time
- Brailled scripts
- Reader / Communication support worker
- Transcript made of script
- Scribe
- Modified language
- Modified papers
- Word processor
- Separate invigilation

We will try to be as flexible as possible when assessing your work so that you can achieve your potential. We do however have to conform to the regulations laid down by examining boards.

### Appeals Procedure

If you wish to make a formal complaint please contact Student Services and they will help you record your concern. All advice and support information is available in a range of formats. Please let us know what format you require.

Specific information sheets are available from Learning Support which give more details about support for disabilities or learning difficulties.

## **Appendix 19: Learning Support Policy Statement**

XX College recognises that all students may need help with their learning at some time during their College career and that some students will need a significant amount of support to enable them to achieve their potential. Learning Support is available for learners at the College who have been assessed as in need of support although the amount available and type will vary, with reasonable adjustments made according to need.

1 All students will be made aware of the support systems that are available and all publicity material will promote a positive image of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The College Disability Statement, 'Enabling Success', will be made available in different formats on request.

2 There will be close liaison with partner schools / colleges, parents, internal curriculum teams and other relevant professionals to ensure a planned transition for students with identified learning needs.

3 Students who disclose that they need extra support will be invited to discuss their needs with a member of the Learning Support Team.

4 Students who need to familiarise themselves with the College environment will be encouraged to visit the college before the term starts.

5. All HE students with additional support needs will be admitted on the basis of the partner university admissions policy.

6. All HE students with additional support needs will be guided through the DSA process

### **ENTRY**

1 All students will be asked during the induction period to identify any Learning Support needs that they may have.

2 Heads of School will be informed of any students on their courses who may need additional support. With the individual's consent, tutors will be informed of the learning needs of students with disabilities / learning difficulties via a leaflet.

3 All courses will include a diagnostic assessment during the first six weeks, which will alert tutors and learners to potential problems.

4 All referrals will be passed to the relevant Monitoring Tutor for attention and action.

5 The initial tutorial with a Learning Support Coordinator will assess the level of support needed within the College context and organise the provision.

6 The range of support available will be promoted throughout the year.

7 All students with significant support needs will have a Monitoring Tutor in Learning Support who will assess need, set up a package of support and monitor the effectiveness of provision.

### **ON COURSE**

1 Students with identified needs will be able to access Learning Support provision during their course. Their learning needs and College's response will be formalised in a written contract or alternative format. For some students a package of support will be provided. Support will be reviewed at regular intervals. Copies of the contract will be sent to personal tutors and referring tutors.

2 Personal and subject tutors will encourage students with identified needs who are 'at risk' to access Learning Support as part of the cycle of review and action planning.

3 Learning Support staff will ensure that their knowledge and skills related to support are regularly updated. Disability awareness sessions will be available to all College staff.

4. Subject specific resources will be used where appropriate with course teams to ensure the support learners receive is relevant to the needs of the programme.

5 Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and will be helped to develop their skills in coping with subject demands.

6. Reasonable adjustments will be made regarding specialist equipment in support of the subject areas.

### **PREPARATION FOR PROGRESSION**

- 1 Appropriate agencies will be informed of support needs if the student so wishes.
- 2 Students are informed of appropriate support agencies e.g. SKILL who can provide information.
- 3 Students are entitled to individual career guidance, which will take into consideration their special needs.
4. Students with disabilities / learning difficulties progressing to HE will be informed of the Disabled Student Allowance.
5. There will be close liaison with partner universities to aid HE students' progression to further study.

### **EVALUATION SYSTEMS**

The service will be evaluated by all students receiving support, a full tutor group chosen at random and a sample of staff.

### **DATA PROTECTION**

Personal information about a disability / learning difficulty will only be passed on to other members of staff with the consent of the individual students.

A Disability Equality Scheme has been published, the action plan sets out to review the scheme annually and revised every three years.

The college is committed to meeting the requirements of the Equality Act to ensure that learners are not discriminated against on the grounds of disability, by actively promoting disability equality and taking steps to eliminate discrimination and harassment. The college publishes a Disability Equality Scheme and annual report setting out how this is being achieved

The document 'Enabling Success' (the College Disability Statement) gives more details. Every opportunity will be given to students to disclose their needs and staff will be briefed to pass on the information appropriately.